

History of Satyananda Yoga in Greece

Volume Two with Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

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In humility
we offer this dedication to
Swami Satyananda Saraswati,
who is
inspiring and guiding
Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati
to live as a sannyasin.



Thank You ...

20 October 2010

Blessed Self

Hari Om

There comes a time, when one is able to stand aside and gaze with silent awe, and with a profoundly grateful heart, at the beauty of the mysterious grace that has coloured and shaped every moment of life. Today is such a time.

On this day we end our humble endeavour to tell the tale of how two very great men sanctified the land of Greece with a cornucopia of gifts and graces. This tale is told in two books; one describing the visits to Greece by Swami Satyananda, our guru, and the other the visits by his successor, Swami Niranjanananda. As I finish reading them, a feeling of overwhelming praise and thanks fills my soul and heart. What words can one find to adequately express appropriate gratitude, not only for that which they have given to me personally, but also for what they have so freely and selflessly given to an entire nation and its people? Swami Satyananda told us many times, "The law of the Lord is love; the language of the Lord is silence." It is impossible for me to find the words to express the intensity of my feelings of gratitude to our guru, either on behalf of myself, or on behalf of the many Greek people who have been blessed to experience the presence and grace of both spiritual masters. I pray that the brevity of my words may allow the silence in my heart to reach the silence in the heart of my guru, whose law is always and only: love.

Today is also a time to thank the countless men, women, and children, from Greece and abroad, who have assisted and supported Satyanandashram Hellas, from the first day of my arrival in Kalamata until today, and those who will continue to do so in the future. To begin and encourage the growth of the yogic teachings in Greece, and to found an ashram and guide an umbrella organization of various yoga centres, was not my sole accomplishment. Far from it. The path of Satyanandashram Hellas is paved with a very beautiful mosaic full of vibrant colours and radiant jewels.

Each individual tile in the mosaic has its own shape, brilliance, and purpose in the overall design. Some are large, and others are tiny; some have a clear sheen, and others are rather cloudy; some tiles have equal sides, some are not quite so balanced, and others are a little quirky; some are glued well into the path, while others have gone missing; and some are very grandly placed near the centre of the mosaic, whereas others lie as close to the far edge as they can get. And yet each tile depends on the others to complete the whole, and to give meaning to the mosaic's existence, even those that are missing, have been stolen, or are badly chipped. Each tile is equal though not the same; each tile plays its part as only it can; and each tile, present or not present, is irreplaceable.

To name all the people who have contributed to the growth and development of Satyanandashram Hellas, and who have selflessly supported and assisted both myself and the ashram and yoga centres, would require a third book and an astounding memory. Some names were never known, as some who have helped gave what they had to give and quietly went on their way, without any of us noticing their arrival

or departure. Some people have remained with us since the beginning, and others have played their part and moved on as was their role and destiny. There has never been a time, since 1976, when I have not been supported by many people, particularly in Greece, who have given selflessly and tirelessly in order to accomplish the mission of our guru. Some have given of their talents and labour; some have given money and other goods; some have freely given their counsel, specific knowledge, and advice; some have provided transport or accommodation; some have arranged lectures, workshops, seminars and other programs; some have taken care of those shy about visiting the ashram or learning yoga, while others have been hospitable to foreigners, visitors or people alone and in need; some have provided meals, sewn clothes, and spent seemingly endless hours cleaning or gardening with inadequate tools, and others have gained back pain from sitting in bad chairs while folding brochures and licking envelopes; and some have given their entire life in service to their guru and the accomplishment of his mission in this part of the world. To all, my thanks and the thanks of all who have, and are, and will be a part of Satyanandashram Hellas. There are also those who did not directly contribute to our development, but who cared for and supported those who did. To all husbands and wives, to all children and other family members, and to all partners, lovers, friends and colleagues, who endured long tedious hours of isolation, and who could never understand why their loved ones undertook seemingly pointless hours of seva yoga; to all, our thanks. Many people who work in the public service, and various government officials have also assisted us, as have others from the corporate world. Others from small businesses, from

various trades, from the arts and crafts communities, from hotels, taxis, and restaurants, and from healthcare and educational institutions, have been exceedingly generous with their support, advice, gifts and time; again, our thanks to you.

As well as thanking all the Greek sannyasins, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the great number of swamis and sannyasins from other countries who have served their guru in Greece by contributing their skills, time and energy at Satyanandashram Hellas. Thank you.

My family in Australia has always been exceedingly generous in their encouragement and support to both myself and Satyanandashram Hellas. To all family members, thank you.

There are many people who are responsible for the compilation and production of both of these books. Many who recorded their experiences some years ago and others more recently. To all involved, thank you.

And to all who may not be on the above list and who should be, our thanks to you also.

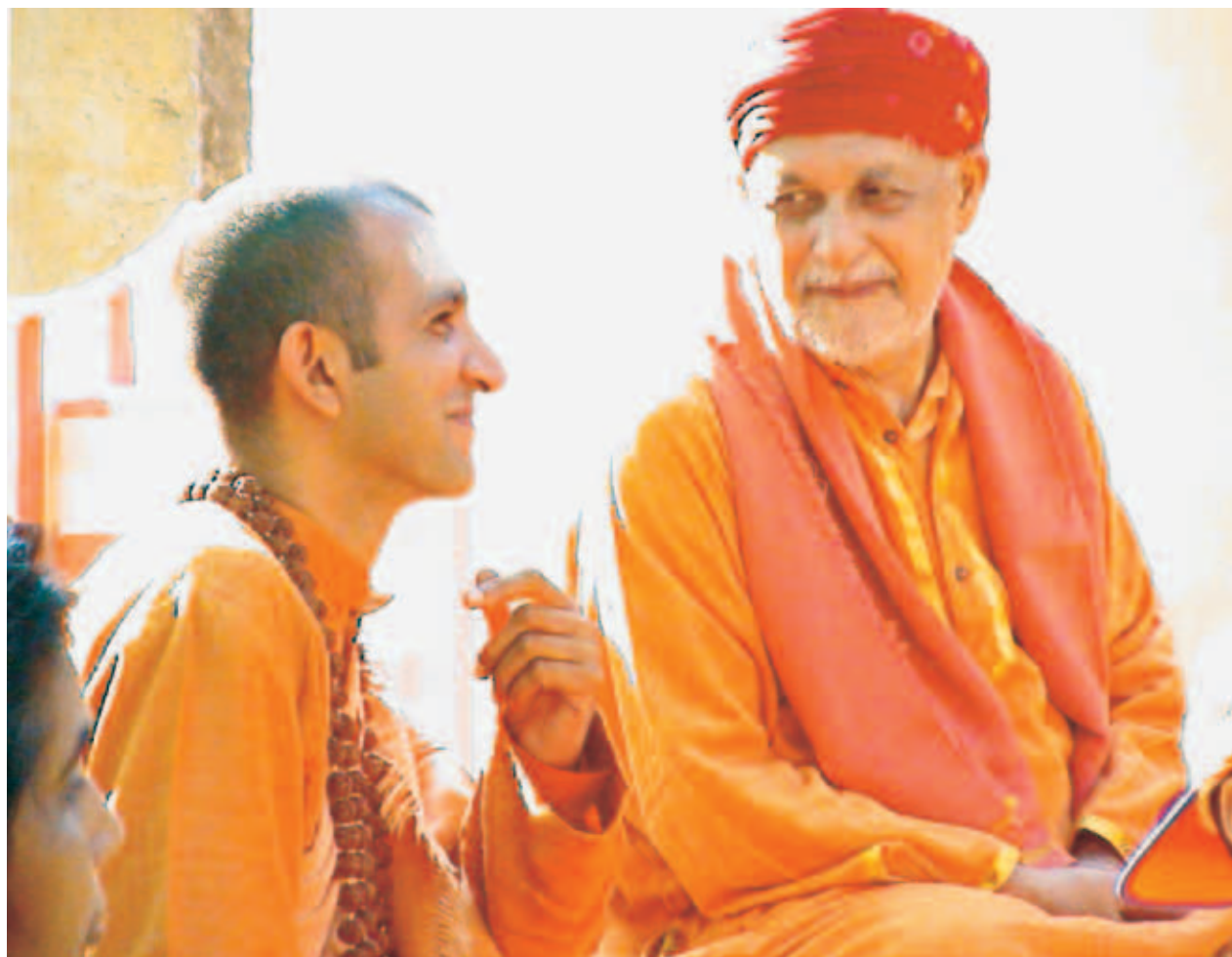
Finally, I would like to thank Swami Niranjanananda for giving us all, at Satyanandashram Hellas, this opportunity to recall the beautiful memories of the visits to Greece of our two beloved spiritual masters. The compilation of these two books has been a tremendous journey, and given us much joy, as the past resurfaced with fresh and deeper meanings that illustrated, over and over again, the abundant grace and blessings our gurus have showered upon us.

A new chapter, in the life of us all, has begun with the Mahasamadhi of our beloved Swami Satyananda. I have not met any disciple who does not continue to feel his presence with them. Indeed, the spirit of our guru seems even more intimate and closer to us. It was

a great honour for many Greek people to attend the Shodashi Pooja at Rikhiapeeth and the Shraddhanjali Saptah at Ganga Darshan, and be with other disciples from all over the world. Many memories of our guru came to mind: memories of humour, tenderness, wisdom and joy, as well as others of grief, sorrow, and yearning. But the most beautiful memory of all, was

the memory of his instant smile of deep recognition and love, as he stepped on to the soil of Greece, and placed the first tile at the very centre of the dazzling and resplendent mosaic that became and is Satyanandashram Hellas.

Om Tat Sat
Swami Sivamurti Saraswati



Swamí Niranjanananda Saraswatí's Visits to Greece 1979–2008

1979: Swami Niranjanananda arrived in Athens on 6 June for a three-week visit. He gave public lectures in Athens and Kalamata, as well as speaking to students at the yoga centres and in private homes. He gave special lectures to the teacher trainees at the yoga centre in Athens.

2000: He arrived in Athens on 23 March and travelled to Satyanandashram Hellas at Paiania where he presided over two events. One was a two-day program on 'The Application of Yoga in Drug and Alcohol Rehabilitation' organized by the European Yoga Fellowship (EYF); and the other was a set of three programs organized by Satyanandashram Hellas ('Sannyasa Festival', 'A Celebration with the Guru', 'Yoga Day'). He also delivered public lectures on yoga in Athens.

2005: He arrived on 4 June for a three-day stay at Satyanandashram Hellas. The theme of his programs was 'Yoga, Balance and Harmony'. A group of Greek karma sannyasins performed a short play with a theme from ancient Greece. Traditional Greek dances were also performed in honour of Swami Niranjanananda.

2008: He arrived on 27 May for a three-day program on 'Living Yoga' at Satyanandashram Hellas. A play, based on an extract from Plato's *The Symposium*, was presented by a group of Greek karma sannyasins. The play was followed by Greek traditional songs and dances and a satsang with Swami Niranjanananda.

Satyanandashram Hellas

Our Vision

The ways of the world are many, but the way to God, to spirit, to divinity, is one.

Dedication to the upliftment of others, seeing others in oneself and oneself in others; this is the ultimate yoga.

There is no other way to change our limited, egocentric vision to a cosmic vision.

This is the path and this is the yoga of the next century – call it ‘freedom yoga’.

—Swami Satyananda

Each individual has the right to experience freedom, harmony, and peace. Satyanandashram Hellas exists to further that right, through providing access to the teachings and healing properties of yoga that seek to unite people regardless of race, gender, class, or creed.

Under the inspiration of her guru, Swami Satyananda Saraswati, Satyanandashram Hellas was established by Swami Sivamurti Saraswati in 1976. Our residential ashram at Paiania (east of Athens) was founded by her in 1984. It is a non-profit organization that aims to fulfil the yogic mission, to “carry the message of yoga from shore to shore and from door to door”, which was instituted by Swami Satyananda and continued by his successor, Swami Niranjanananda, and their lineage. Swami Satyananda appointed Swami Sivamurti to be the acharya of Satyanandashram Hellas and he inaugurated the ashram in 1985.

The town of Paiania is regarded by many as the birth place of the philosopher, Socrates (469–399 BCE), and the renowned orator, Demosthenes (384–322 BCE). Little remains today of the ancient town, one of the oldest in Attica, but many tourists still visit Paiania today to see the famous Koutouki cave which is situated on the eastern slopes of Mt Hymettos on the road to the ashram. The land, on which Satyanandashram Hellas lies, has a long history of spiritual activity. Two Greek Orthodox monasteries and several churches are the ashram’s immediate neighbours. The ashram itself is said to have once been a sanctuary where the esoteric Dionysian mysteries were taught to ancient bhaktas. Today

we commonly associate the god Dionysus with wine and sexual excess, but this was not the association in ancient Greece. With the Orphic and Eleusian mysteries, the Dionysian mysteries were the teachings most closely linked to yogic thought and esoteric knowledge. Towering over these ancient sanctuaries, on the summit of Mt Hymettos, was a statue of Zeus, the father of Dionysus and the mightiest of all the Greek gods. Dionysus’ counterpart in yoga and tantra is Shiva, and the energies, symbols and bhakti practices associated with both gods are very similar. The Dionysian energies are associated with the path of self-knowledge and thus appropriate to the paths of yoga and sannyasa.

Satyanandashram Hellas offers training in the sannyasa gurukul tradition, in yogic practices, and in yoga teacher training. The practices of Satyananda Yoga work on all levels of the body and mind, to achieve better health and wellbeing, and to develop contentment and tranquillity. They also awaken the inner potential of each person and enhance creativity, concentration, and positivity. They reduce tension and stress, and enable an individual to achieve more in life, work and relationships. Satyananda Yoga combines modern scientific thought with traditional ancient wisdom. It offers a holistic style of yoga that is designed to meet the needs of modern humanity. It takes the benefits of yoga into the wider community, through collaborating with professionals in such fields as health and rehabilitation, education, ecology, business, prisons, care of the aged, care of the disabled, space programs, and the armed services. It undertakes research into the effects of yoga on the mind and body, and offers people a healthy lifestyle which can be incorporated into their existing one.

The Paiania ashram is supported by Satyananda Yoga Centres in the town of Paiania and in the cities of Athens and Thessaloniki. There are also independent yoga centres and yoga teachers in Athens, Chania, Drama, Kavala, Larissa, Mitilini, Patra, Thessaloniki, Volos, and Xanthi, which assist and support the activities and teachings of Satyanandashram Hellas. These centres and teachers act as stepping stones to bring people into closer contact with the ashram.

The ashram is constructed around an inner courtyard and the buildings include dormitories, kitchen, library, audiovisual facilities, offices and a computer department, two indoor halls, a large outdoor auditorium seating five hundred people, and two outdoor workshop areas. Close to the ashram there is a piece of land that is cultivated by the sannyasins with organically-grown vegetables.

Seva yoga projects, for visitors, as well as residents, include gardening, organic farming, arts and crafts, video subtitling and audio transcription of yoga discourses and seminars, the production of the Greek newsletter Satyanandashram Hellas Newssheet; music groups that study kirtans, bhajans and ragas and record kirtans; and the projects of Satyananda Math that include the collection of goods and medicines for Paramahamsaji’s Rikhia neighbours (in association

with Sivananda Math), and helping the needy and disadvantaged in Greece and the Balkan countries.

The programs offered at the ashram include seminars and opportunities to experience the various aspects of yoga such as hatha yoga, karma yoga, seva yoga, bhakti yoga, kriya yoga, tattwa shuddhi, nada yoga, raja yoga and meditation practices, yoga for children, yoga for women, yoga for men, living consciously, ashram lifestyle, mind management, emotional management and health management courses. A Satyananda Yoga instructors' course is available in both Greek and English. Yogic lifestyle courses are offered to groups from different countries. Sannyasa life experience courses are also held periodically, and regular times are set aside for karma and jignasu sannyasins to come to the ashram for renewal of commitment and further study. Gurukul programs are held on a bi-monthly basis for children and adolescents. It is a time of fun and alternative education. Individual yoga classes and personal programs are also available.

Celebrations and festivals are held during the year particularly at Guru Poornima, Navaratri, Sivaratri, Christmas, New Year and Easter. An Open Day is also held each year. Wandering seminars are times when the focus is on spontaneity, joy, living close to nature, and learning how to adapt to change. These seminars are led by sannyasins who have spent many summers wandering over the mainland of Greece and many of its islands. Yoga sun and sea seminars are also offered at this time. Public talks, lectures and seminars are given outside the ashram by qualified sannyasins, on a range of topics including nada yoga, kriya yoga, yogic diet and nutrition, yoga in education, to name just a few.

Our source of inspiration, and the foundation of all our activities, is derived from the abundance of love, wisdom, and creative energy that flows continually from our guru, Swami Satyananda and his successor, Swami Niranjanananda. We are also blessed by the grace and gifts of our paramguru, Swami Sivananda, and all the spiritual masters and wise yogis of our Saraswati lineage including Swami Satyasangananda, who has visited us in the past with Swami Satyananda, and revisited us in 2010 during Ashwin Navaratri.

Although based in Greece, with a primary focus on that country and those of the neighbouring Balkans, Satyanandashram Hellas welcomes people from all over the world, and our attitude to the public is based on courtesy and respect for individual talents and abilities. Satyanandashram Hellas strives to create an environment in our ashram and yoga centres that is based on freedom and goodwill, and which encourages understanding of different cultures, faiths, and traditions. We endeavour to meet each individual on their level and without confrontation, and we embrace unity through an appreciation of diversity.

Hari Om Tat Sat



Homage to Swami Niranjan

*Swami Sivamurti Saraswati, Acharya,
Satyanandashram Hellas*

The guru is our inspirer: the one who brings light into our life, the one who removes the extraneous material from our mind, and the one who works on our ego, because it is our ego which separates us from divinity. Of course, we read about this in books, but we don't really know what it means until we put such a relationship into practice, by becoming a disciple of a particular guru, and allowing him to start working on us. The guru is also the one we want to emulate, because he represents to us either divinity, or the closest that we can get to divinity. He sets the pattern for our behaviour, our thoughts, our words and our deeds.

Two of the most important qualities that we need to develop within ourselves, if we wish to consider ourselves a guru's disciple, are faith and surrender. Faith is firm belief, a firm confidence, and a trust in our guru no matter what happens. In the beginning this is easy, because we come to him loaded with ideas from the scriptures, on how the spiritual life will be, or how it could be. However, it can be a very different situation when we find ourselves undergoing the training and discipline that are necessary in order to remove, from our minds, the extraneous material that prevents us from experiencing our true nature or Self.

As long as the guru smiles at us, as long as he is gentle and kind with us, as long as he welcomes us, and as long as he appears to recognize us, we feel very comfortable,



loved and well looked after. But a disciple's training is not always like that. We may think that it is nice to have everything we want in life, and not face any difficulties or adversities. However, in reality, this would make us complacent, and life would be very monotonous.

During my life, I have been fortunate to have met and lived with two men of faith, two gurus who are also two disciples: Swami Satyananda and Swami Niranjanananda. When I was with Swami Satyananda, living with him and

listening to his stories, he used to tell us about his own time in his guru's ashram, and the experiences he had there. His experiences showed us that on every level, he totally trusted and totally surrendered to his guru. When that surrender takes place, one even starts to look like their guru.

Swami Satyananda once said, "It is very difficult to be a disciple. Nobody becomes a disciple simply by getting initiated or by smoking the pipe of the guru. When a carpenter wants to make something from a piece of wood, he envisions what he will shape, and fashions it in his own way. The wood is cut, chiselled and filed, but it does not question the carpenter. Similarly, a piece of cloth does not question the tailor. Leather does not question the shoemaker. I appointed Swami Niranjan as my successor in 1983. I have full faith that he will come as a divine light into the spiritual lives of many."

In Swami Niranjan's life, we see both total faith and total surrender to his guru Swami Satyananda. They are both 'gurus and disciples' because, as I mentioned earlier, a disciple is one who can surrender and who has faith. As long as we cannot manage to do that, we will always remain just aspirants, and not true disciples, and won't have the connection with the guru that we yearn for.

An anecdote comes to mind regarding Diogenes, an ancient Greek sage. Diogenes was a renunciate who had no possessions and lived in a wine barrel. He was considered to be one of the great masters of ancient Greece and, day and night, he would walk around the city with a lantern in his hand. People asked him why he went around like that, with a lighted lantern, especially in daylight. What was he looking for that the sun alone could not reveal? He answered, "I am searching for a man." Such a person he believed he could never find. However, if Diogenes had met Swami Niranjan, he would have extinguished his lantern.



Swami Satyananda always said, "It is very easy to be a guru, a leader, or a pontiff and such, but it is very difficult to be a man. Because to be a man, one has to have killed everything inside so that one is empty and, only then, the purest consciousness flows through that one."

It reminds me of the story of Radha and Krishna. One day Radha asked Krishna, "O my dear! Why do you love the flute more than me?" Krishna replied, "This flute is

very dear to me as it has made its inner hollow quite void, allowing the purest consciousness to express itself freely without any impediment. If you can also empty yourself in this way, then I can love you as I love this flute."

Swami Niranjana's capacity to trust, and to surrender, has so fashioned him, that the music of pure consciousness is able to flow as freely through him as it does through Krishna's flute.

Beginnings

Understanding

It was the year 1979. All the passengers of the international jet liner had disembarked, but Swami Niranjana was not among them? I checked my papers to be sure that I was meeting the correct flight. Yes, all was in order. He should have been among them, but he was not.

Around me people were greeting one another, hugging, meeting one another after long years of separation, and slowly but surely moving towards their awaiting vehicles. The once crowded airport was suddenly desolate. He was nowhere to be seen. I started to recall Paramahansa's words regarding his visit, over and over. Yes, he had to be on the flight, so I must start looking for him.

After some time I found an Olympic Airline's official and asked him if he had seen anyone of Indian nationality dressed in geru robes. He asked another and yet another. Eventually one of these men came up to me and informed me that such a person was on the flight and that they were making preparations to send him back on the next flight.

I showed all the papers I had agreeing to Swami Niranjana's entry into Greece for a period of time. All had been duly stamped by numerous officials. After a lot of explaining and convincing, the officials finally agreed that he could enter the country providing I took full responsibility.

I waited. Again it was quiet and four hours passed.

Then the moment came. He was there a few metres in front of me. Young, tall, radiant, wearing a geru poncho and geru dhoti around his head. I clearly remember the

first moment I saw him. I can recall it at any time. Then he smiled and I went to greet him and welcome him to Greece.

There is an old saying – I think most cultures are familiar with it – that it is the first impression that counts and bears great importance. Well, that impression was of colour, warmth, radiance, strength, playfulness, an iron will and, perhaps on top of all that, deep understanding.

Then everything happened very quickly. We were ushered into a waiting car and driven to the hotel where a lecture had been scheduled for that evening. Thus began my first days with Swami Niranjana.

During our time together, I asked him what, in his opinion, was the highest virtue an individual must have. His answer was one word, “Understanding”. I connected this word with him when I first saw him and I still connect it with him today. An individual who understands, is one who can immediately put himself

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in another person’s position, and answer according to his needs. And what is more beautiful than to be with someone who understands you? Words are not so necessary, explanations are uncalled for, as the other person simply knows what needs to be known, and can say just the right thing, at the right time to help you, and enable you to stand on your own two feet again.

Sometimes, when we were together and he spoke to me, I felt as if Paramahamsaji was looking through his eyes, and speaking through his lips. Paramahamsaji was so much a part of his being.

In those days the ashram in Athens was very small: just a sadhana room, a bathroom, and a changing room and kitchen combined. He immediately settled into the changing room. He did not complain, and he did not ask for a bed, for we did not even have any beds. He just settled himself in and adapted, adjusted, and accommodated himself. He asked for nothing, and accepted what came. He requested no special food, nothing. He just fitted in because he understood.

In looking back, it was not so much the official times we spent together – where he delivered lectures, held satsangs, gave seminars, met people, gave interviews, etc. (although these had everyone spellbound that one so young knew so much) – that I recall, but the unofficial moments when we just spent time together.

Sometimes he was very serious, withdrawn, and appearing to be in another space. At other times we played, toured, and had so much fun laughing with life. The people of Greece responded to both his mental powers and his fun-loving side.

Tributes to Swami Niranjan

We are one

*Rev. Antoinette Schoenmaker, Meritus,
The Independent Church of Australia*

I have had the great privilege and pleasure of meeting and working with Swami Niranjan on three occasions. The first two were during the annual Sita Kalyanam festival at Rikhia. The third was during an International Yoga Convention at Satyanandashram in Greece. During the first two meetings, Swami Niranjan made us very welcome but remained in the background, always working to ensure that our visit and the Cosmic Mass we had come to celebrate with Swami Satyananda went smoothly, but the third time, in Athens, he himself co-celebrated the Mass with me.

This visit to the Satyanandashram Hellas was a time of rich blessing and fellowship. Wherever I went in the ashram, people would come to me and say, "I knew your father. We all loved him so much. We feel ourselves very blessed to have met him and known him." I never really knew until then how much work Rev. Mario had done in Greece and how many people he had touched. I am so grateful to Swami Sivamurti, who really made this possible.

So, it was in this setting and atmosphere that Swami Niranjan and I celebrated the Cosmic Mass. And I must say I have never celebrated such a Mass as on the 2nd April 2000. I have never experienced as much openness and devotion. There were people of so many nationalities present, not just the Greek people but people from



England, Spain, France, Holland, Germany, Italy, Austria, Russia, and all the Balkan countries. The Europeans have a soul that is very soft and devotional. The Mass speaks to them so very clearly. This openness particularly displayed itself at Communion when the people came forward with overflowing eyes and kissing the hand that gave the host.

At this Mass we again sang, "It's love that makes the world go round", and you should see the photos of these four hundred and fifty people of all nations pointing to one another and saying, "It's you who makes the love go round."

Swami Niranjan looked so regal in our priest gown and the Greek stole that my father once bought on a visit to Greece. He asked me to speak again about the relationship between his tradition and the priesthood of Melchizedek as it emerged from Atlantis, and went first to India in order to safeguard and keep the spiritual knowledge pure. Again, I experienced, "You are my brother, you are a priest. We are one." It was a really wonderful moment to celebrate the priest communion, me offering the host and

Swami Niranjan the chalice of wine, with all the swamis who were present and to feel our brotherhood and unity and commitment to the work. It was great to have this moment in which to stand together.

I have found Swami Niranjan a true inheritor of the gifts and qualities we saw and experienced in Swami Satyananda. He is a true and beloved disciple, embodying the knowledge but also the ability and love to continue what has been created. I experienced him in India as someone with an immense but also quiet authority. He could control the very large crowds simply by standing up or moving his eyes. His aura, it seems could encompass us all. He was always there making sure the purpose we had met for would be achieved. A quick and orderly mind that,





like the eagle, can see the big picture but also zoom in to the smallest detail.

I also very much remember his quick smile, dancing eyes and great gentility, an ability to flow and to issue grace and blessing. A person who loves to laugh and a very generous soul.

I feel very much for him at this time of transition. Roles, power, authority and responsibility have passed to him through the years and he has taken these up, but nevertheless this is a special time, the first years after the passing of the Master, a time of sorrow, a time to really realize the great gifts given, a time when everything subtly changes. I also know from my own experience of my teacher dying, how much love and grace is experienced at this time. It is as if one is moving in a Sea of Love. It is as if, through the love for the Master, one

can experience more closely the spiritual worlds they now inhabit. And this will especially be true for Swami Niranjana because of his close spiritual bond with Swami Satyananda. He will be an agent of great inspiration and teaching and blessing.

I am so thankful for our meetings and our work together, for all I was enabled to see and experience and learn and also for what we realized and accepted together, and I pray that many blessings will continue to accompany Swami Niranjana in his life and work.

Embodiment of love and divinity

Sannyasi Satyamurti, Thessaloniki

I met my guru, Swami Niranjana, on my first trip to India in 1998. The recognition that took place was totally unexpected, magical beyond any comprehension and my life has never been the same. When I returned home and people asked me to describe him, only one word came to mind: divine. To me Swami Niranjana is the embodiment of love and divinity, nothing less.

In my first ever satsang with him in Munger he said, "Giving is an art. To a society that still lives in the 16th century we have to offer what is needed in the 16th century." Those words touched me very deeply and I saw this art perfected in Him. His hands are always empty as he immediately offers whatever he receives to where it is needed.

Since I met him, he has inspired me to travel to places I had not visited before: Wales, Holland, Barcelona, Mallorca, Venice, Slovenia, Germany, Bretagne, Bulgaria and Hungary. And he has taken me to places inside myself that I never knew existed, light and dark, happy and difficult places. He is always there. If an experience is painful, I see the compassion, the love, the care in his kind eyes and take courage that it will be resolved and pass.

Every moment in his presence is precious and educational. I remember his words in Bretagne: "Why do you all want to become teachers?" he asked. "Why don't you want to become students and allow the guru to take you the way he thinks better?" That is another ideal he has set for us, that of the perfect disciple as we have seen him in his relationship with Paramahansa Sri. I

Swami Niranjana in his own mysterious and subtle way, somehow brings me closer to myself and encourages me to express more of my true hidden nature. In front of him, I can't use any masks, I can only be me. I remember once in Rikhia, he was sitting relaxed in Tapovan during a break and different people were approaching him. I longed to go up to him and started raking my brain for a question to



ask, some excuse to go to him. My longing was so intense that I got up and started walking towards him, while still thinking of something to say. Somewhat shy, I got closer while he was joking with two Indian ladies, and sat near his feet. I didn't understand a word of their conversation, but I laughed with them and sat there in bliss, at the feet of my guru. When the conversation was over, Swamiji said, "Theek hai ji", thus concluding the meeting, got up and left. There I realized that I did not need any intellectual or fake excuses to be near the guru. There was no need to lie, just to follow my heart and be myself. What I receive in his presence resonates in my system for a long time after and keeps me on track while we are apart.

Swamiji has said in satsang that normal people 'fall in love', but 'we rise in love'. Indeed, with his love he takes one high into the skies, while at the same time teaching one how to be grounded and established in their true self. Shivam, Satyam, Sundaram is what I see every moment in Swami Niranjana and I am eternally grateful for his presence in my life.

Brain and education

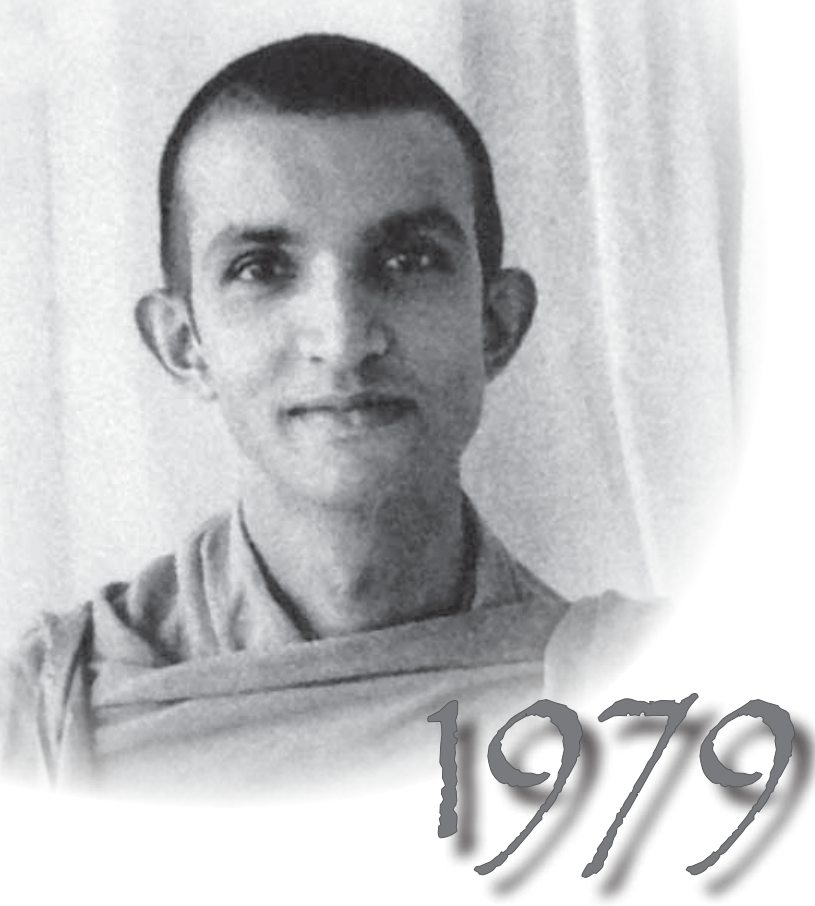
Maria Zafrana, Prof. Emeritus of Psychology, Aristotelian University of Thessaloniki

I met Swami Niranjana during an international conference organized by RYE France (Research of Yoga in Education), in collaboration with UNESCO, in Paris. I had been invited by Micheline Flak, President of RYE France, to give a lecture on 'Brain and Education'. The topic of the conference focused on innovative ways for the renewal and improvement of education. My lecture expounded the latest findings of brain functioning, including a scientific explanation of the value and effect of yoga nidra, in relaxing and reprogramming the brain.



Even today, I remember Swami Niranjana, who was chairman of the panel while I was giving the lecture, turning his head towards me with full interest and a glowing smile, especially when I drew the parallel between the scientific evidence and the related yoga practices. At the end he stood up, hugged me and told me a phrase I will always remember, "Mrs Zafrana, I did not know that Greece had such diamonds. Can I have your paper so I can publish it in the monthly Yoga magazine of the Bihar School of Yoga?"

The paper was published and Swami Niranjana invited me to teach at the University of Bihar for six months. Throughout the years we maintained a warm and respectful contact and I had the opportunity to meet with him again during his visits to Greece in 2000 and 2008 where, apart from giving programs, we had the opportunity to exchange news and ideas on subjects of common interest. I will always remember the smiling wise man with the purity and freshness of a child.



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Day-by-Day Itinerary

Swami Niranjan arrived in Greece from India for a three-week program. He conducted lectures, satsangs, and seminars on yoga. He also held practical sessions on asana, pranayama, relaxation and meditation practices. He visited Athens and Kalamata.

Wednesday, 6 June

Arrival at Athens airport.

Swami Niranjan conducted his opening lecture at the Royal Olympic Hotel, Athens. The title of his lecture was 'Yoga: Our Common Heritage'.

Thursday, 7 June

Satsang at the home of Mr Vasilios and Mrs Lillian Papathanassopoulou, Athens. Swami Niranjan answered various questions on yoga. Fifty people attended.

Friday, 8 June

Public talk and satsang at the home of devotee Mr Victor Hill, Kalamata. Swami Niranjan spoke on the topic 'Yoga for Children', and answered questions on children and other aspects of yoga. Forty people attended.

Saturday, 9 June

Satsang at the home of a yoga student in Kalamata. Swami Niranjan answered questions on yoga and the spiritual life. There were fifty people present.

Wednesday, 13 June

Satsang at the home of Mr Manos Tsatsakis, Athens. Swami Niranjan answered many questions on yoga and its application in everyday life. Seventy people attended.

Thursday, 14 June

Lecture at the Teachers' Training Course at Satyanandashram in Kypseli. Swami Niranjan spoke on the topic 'The Science of Yoga' and answered various questions on the scientific approach of yoga. There were fifty people present from Athens and Kalamata.

Friday, 15 June

Morning asana and pranayama class at the Teacher's Training Course at Satyanandashram in Kypseli. Swami Niranjan gave a yoga class introducing pawanmuktasana, breathing and pranayama practices. There were approximately twenty-five people from Athens and Kalamata participating in the course.

Lecture at the Teacher's Training Course at Satyanandashram in Kypseli. Swami Niranjan spoke on asanas, and answered various questions on asanas and their effects on the body, mind and energy. There were fifty people present from Athens and Kalamata.

Saturday, 16 June

Morning asana and pranayama class at the Teachers' Training Course at Satyanandashram in Kypseli. Swami Niranjan gave a yoga class, with further detail on the pawanmuktasana series, and other breathing and pranayama practices. There were twenty-five people participating from Athens and Kalamata.

Lecture at the Teachers' Training Course at Satyanandashram in Kypseli. Swami Niranjan spoke on the topic 'Prana and Pranayama', and answered related questions on the importance of pranayama practice. There were fifty people present from Athens and Kalamata.

Sunday, 17 June

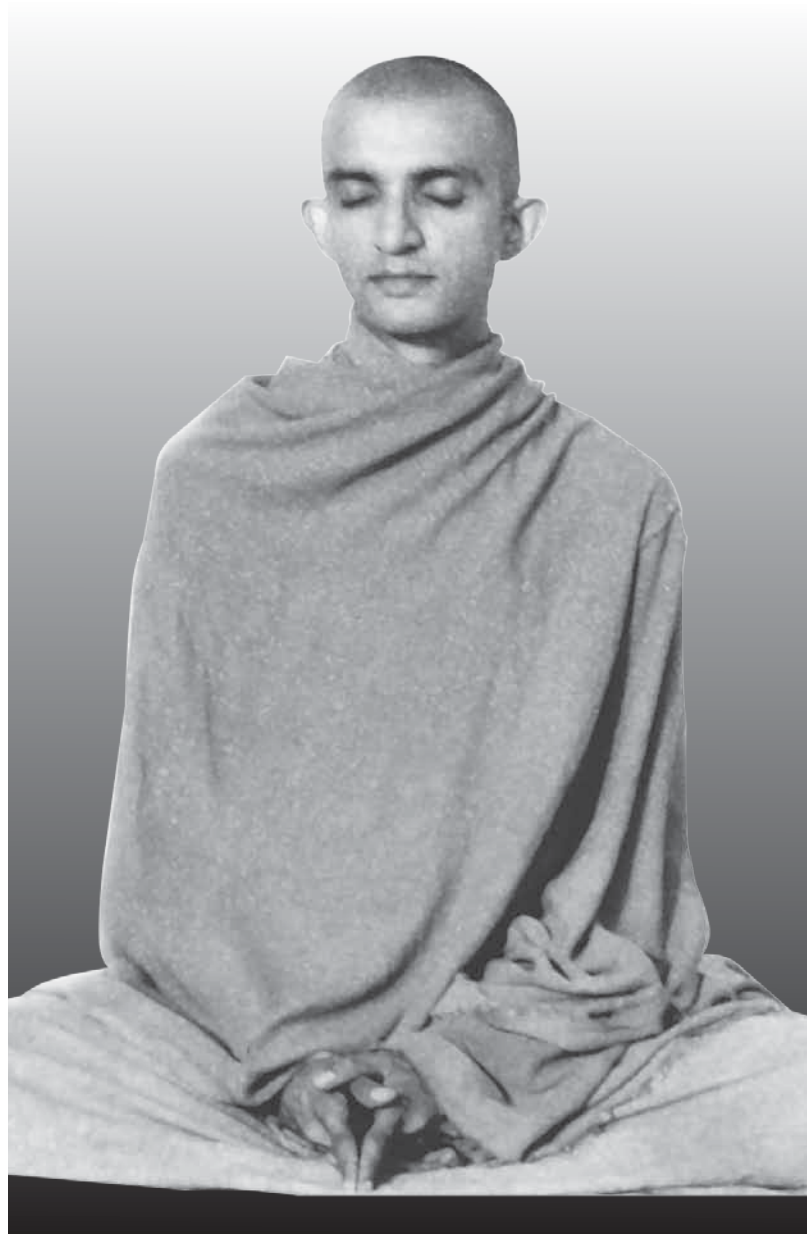
Lecture at the Teachers' Training Course at Satyanandashram in Kypseli. Swami Niranjan spoke on the topic 'Yoga Nidra', and answered various questions on yoga nidra and relaxation. There were fifty people present from Athens and Kalamata.

Monday, 18 June

Lecture and satsang at the Teachers' Training Course at Satyanandashram in Kypseli. Swami Niranjan spoke on the topic 'Yoga Nidra and Ajapa Japa'. There were fifty people present from Athens and Kalamata.

Tuesday, 19 June

Morning asana and pranayama class at the Teachers' Training Course at Satyanandashram in Kypseli. Swami Niranjan gave a yoga class on 'Yoga Therapy'. There were twenty-



five people participating from Athens and Kalamata.

Talk and satsang at the Teachers' Training Course at Satyanandashram in Kypseli. Swami Niranjan spoke on the topic 'Yoga Therapy' and answered various questions. There were fifty people present.

Wednesday, 20 June

Morning shatkarmas at the Teachers' Training Course at Satyanandashram in Kypseli. Swami Niranjan guided the practice of neti and the demonstration of kunjla. Twenty-five people participated.

Lecture and satsang at the Teachers' Training Course at Satyanandashram in Kypseli. Swami Niranjan spoke on the topic 'Mind', which included a concentration practice. There were fifty people present from Athens and Kalamata.

Thursday, 21 June

Satsang and a yoga nidra session at the Teachers' Training Course at Satyanandashram in Kypseli. Swami Niranjan answered many questions on how yoga practice can improve the quality of life. There were fifty people present. These programs ended the eight-day Teachers' Training Course.

Friday, 22 June

Satsang at the home of Mr Manos Tsatsakis, Athens. Swami Niranjan answered many questions on yoga and related subjects. There were eighty people present from Athens. This was the last program Swami Niranjan gave during his first visit to Greece.

Yoga: Our Common Heritage

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

Swami Sivamurti: We are very fortunate to have Swami Niranjan here with us tonight. He has just arrived from India and I would like to take this opportunity to thank him for coming to Greece and to introduce him to you. During his stay, there will be seminars held at the Satyanandashram centre in Kypseli. Anyone interested in following these seminars can take a brochure with the necessary information, or ask someone wearing a 'Yoga' sign.

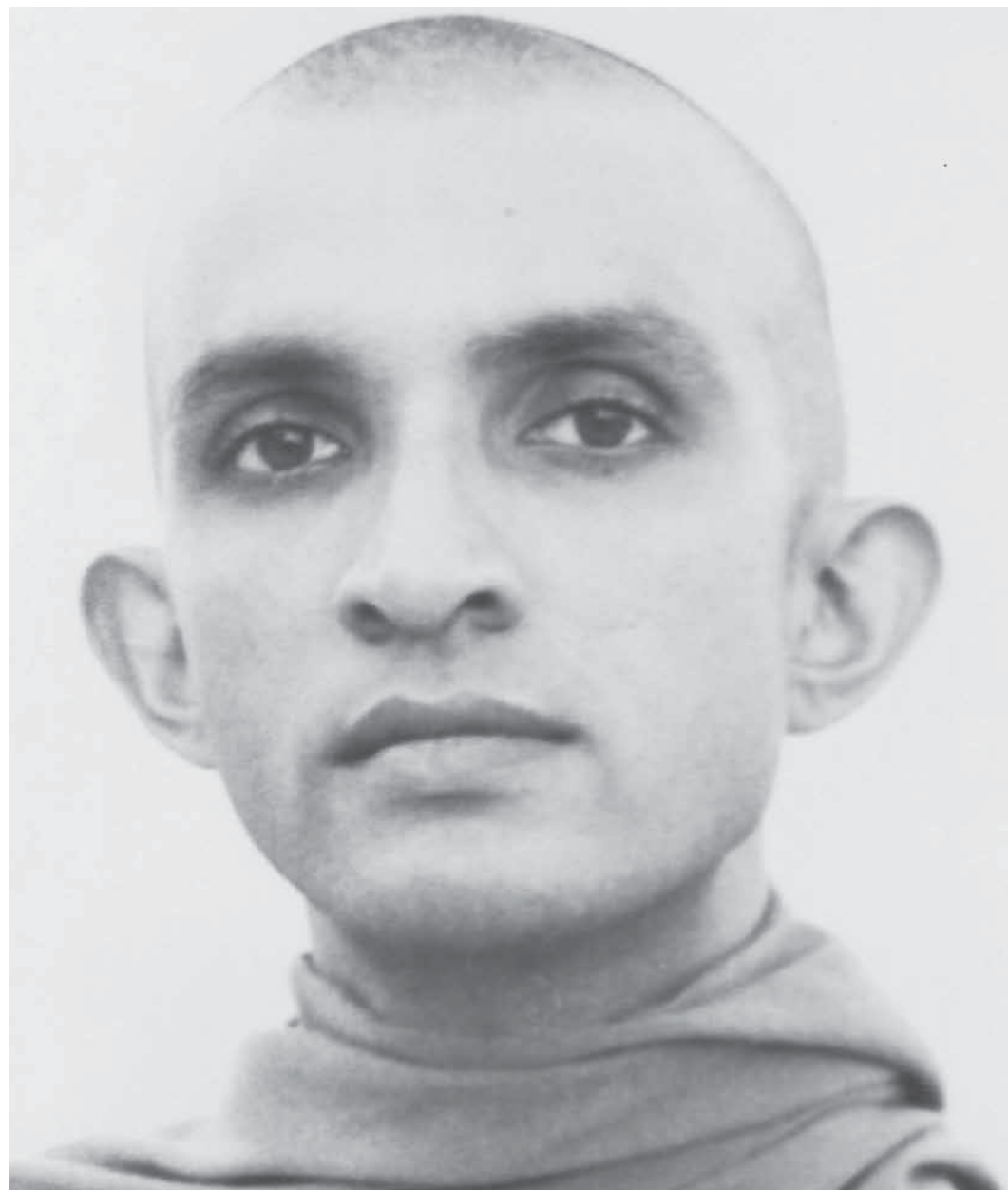
Swami Niranjan: This is the first time I am visiting Greece with the message of yoga, but I am sure it is not the first time you are hearing about it. Today yoga has become a household word. Many people have heard about it, many people have practised it, and many people know about it. However, there are many misconceptions about it, which I would like to clear up.

The word 'yoga' symbolizes the awakening of the inner self, of the inner mind. Although many people think that it has something to do with religion, or is something mystical, they are completely wrong. It is a way by which we can learn how to get rid of pressures and tensions, and come to a relaxed state of mind.

Modern-day problems

Let's look at modern-day problems and present yoga in a scientific way. Today, there is tension, anxiety, worry and anger everywhere. If not these, then there is some sort of a physical problem, ailment, or disease. If there is no physical problem, then there certainly are some psychological problems. If there are no psychological problems, we still don't know how to control the flow of thoughts and desires in the mind. From every angle, something is constantly bugging us, something in the back of our mind. If we can come to know what that is and solve it, then we will be practising yoga.

There is a simple practice, known as yoga nidra, which deals with mental relaxation, and relaxation of the nervous system, through being aware of the



thoughts. Once we achieve this mental relaxation, it helps us to have a clear outlook upon our various problems.

Yoga is not only physical; it is not only spiritual. It is also mental and psychological. To give you a clear description of yoga, I shall tell you a little about its different branches. Let's divide yoga into three groups: physical, mental, and spiritual.

The physical aspect of yoga

In the physical aspect of yoga there are exercises that deal with the development of the body, the glands and the nervous systems. There are also many different types of exercises, simple and difficult. However, when we are practising for a specific reason, then we have to perform the practices and the techniques of yoga for that purpose. With the physical aspect of yoga, one can achieve total coordination of the body with the nervous systems.

The mental aspect of yoga

Once there is coordination in the body and the nervous systems, we come to the mental aspect of yoga. In this area we learn how to tackle our day-to-day problems with relaxation, by developing awareness, and by finding the right solution to our problems. When this process is happening in the mind, many things come up, which are deeply rooted in our subconscious mind. There is a word in Sanskrit, *samskara*, which means 'deep rooted psychological impressions'. By practising the mental aspect of yoga, and the techniques that deal with this area, we bring these *samskaras* from the unconscious to the conscious mind.

A small parenthesis at this point, because I just remembered a true story which I will tell you. There was a psychiatrist in Australia, whose wife was a yoga teacher. He used to treat his patients as any normal psychiatrist would. One day, he received a patient who

had a very funny habit. The person could not stand the sight of meat and, as you may know, in Australia meat consumption is particularly high. He was developing a complex about being an outcast of society. So what to do in this case? The psychiatrist taught him some yoga practices for mental relaxation. After some time the patient recited a story that he had totally forgotten. One day, when he was young, the nurse was feeding him after his parents had gone to work. Being a child, he did not want to have anything. The nurse was forcing him to eat the food. From that day on, he could not stand the sight of food, particularly meat. In the beginning, this person did not know what the cause of his problem was, but after some time, when his mind relaxed, he was able to see his problem and analyze it, through having this vision of his childhood. By analyzing his problem, he was able to find the cause.

Often, when people are suffering due to a particular problem or even just their day-to-day tensions, they fail to realize that the best method to relax oneself is through becoming aware of the problem. There are many inventions nowadays to relax ourselves, like games, clubs, sauna-baths, etc. Not that I am against these things. I rather enjoy them too, but do they get rid of the problem we are facing? No! When we seek pleasure to forget a problem, we are escaping from reality. We are escaping from that problem, and that problem will surface later on in a different manner.

I will give you another example. Today, when I arrived in Greece, there was a slight problem with the visa. At the airport they told me that I had to return to India. Now, at such a time, one would normally get nervous and agitated. After explaining the situation to the official that I had a program to attend, I sat down quietly in a place and started watching the reactions in my body and my mind.

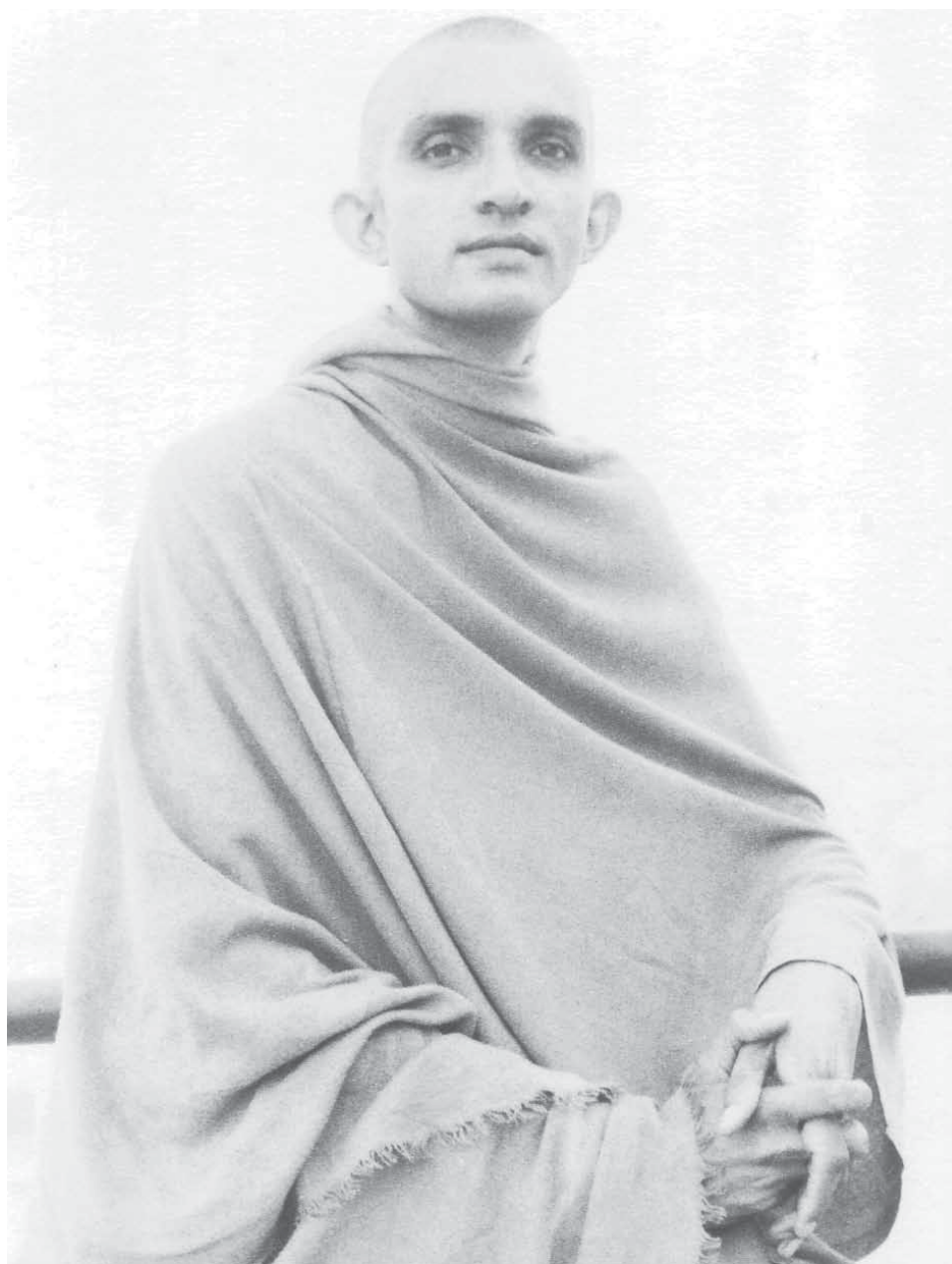
At that time, my whole mind was in a state of confusion. First, I could not understand the language and what the officer was trying to tell me and, second, there was the thought that I would have to go back to India and not be able to attend this program. So, when I sat down in the transit lounge, waiting for the officer to return, I started watching myself. I felt the sensation of a slight tingling in the body. The mind was in total confusion. I looked at my watch. It was three minutes to twelve. I started practising the deep breathing exercises of yoga and, in three minutes flat, I was totally relaxed and at peace, even though I was not able to understand what was going on around me. After that, there was no problem at all.

The practice that was done in those three minutes is very simple. By merely observing the natural incoming and outgoing breath, I was able to relax the thinking process, and become aware of the problem. Once the mind was calm, the nervous system was also calm, and it was possible to sit there, for the remaining three hours, without feeling at all anxious while the officer went through my passport and papers.

In the end he called me and said, "Okay you are allowed to enter the country." I looked at him and laughed, and he said, "You don't look tense or nervous, what have you been doing? In my profession I see so many people become nervous or angry at this point, or they do something totally unreasonable." I said just one word to him, "Yoga." He said three words to me, "What is yoga?" I told him, "It is a process of mental and physical relaxation." We shook hands and I left.

Yoga and relaxation

When you are able to analyze yourself, then you are able to fully relax yourself, and it means that you are practising the mental aspect of yoga. There are many practices to achieve this, such as breathing exercises, watching the



thoughts, trying to relax the nervous system by becoming aware of the different parts of the body, and so on. All these techniques help one to relax.

In our brain there are four waves: alpha, beta, theta and delta. In the waking state, as we are now, beta wave is predominant. When this wave is functioning, then we are prone to mental tension, anxiety and worry. Through the practices of yoga, it is possible to change these wave frequencies, as many researchers have observed. At any time we can turn them into a wave which brings peace, relaxation and clarity of mind.

In Bombay, India, one of the leading cardiologists, Dr Talty, did some research on three types of people: those suffering from cardiac diseases; those suffering from extreme mental tension; and those suffering from high blood pressure. He only taught the three groups the practice of yoga nidra. He executed a battery of tests with EEG, ECG, and blood pressure instruments, to measure the brain waves. The instruments registered such a change in the brain that everyone present was surprised. They wondered how the rhythm could change. Usually the pulse rate rises through excitement due to fear or happiness. Then the heart beats faster and the blood is pulsing. But they had never seen the brain waves change in a person in a state of relaxation. If one is able to maintain a steady rhythm of the wave, then a whole change in the personality takes place.

What happened to the above three groups of people is very interesting. Seven out of ten people, originally suffering from heart disease, tested as having a perfect heart condition. Eight out of ten originally suffering from high blood pressure, tested as having a perfectly normal condition. Ten out of ten previously suffering from extreme mental tension, tested perfectly well.

The spiritual aspect of yoga

After the mental aspect of yoga is the spiritual aspect of yoga, which is meditation. However, not meditation as we know it. The word 'meditation' creates the impression of sitting, closing the eyes, and becoming aware of something such as God or the mind. That is not meditation. Shutting out the external impressions, or blocking internal events, is also not meditation. In yogic meditation we try to go through the three different areas of the mind step by step: the conscious, the subconscious and the unconscious mind.

When we go through the conscious mind with the process of meditation, we start eliminating the thoughts. The many thoughts that flood our mind are reduced to very few. Our external awareness is broader than what it is now.

When we pass through the subconscious mind, all the desires come up. We get a sudden urge to eat something, to do something good or bad, like express anger or love towards somebody. They are all transitory stages in the subconscious

mind, which precede the third stage of meditation, and we have to go through them.

After that we enter the unconscious realm where all the deep-seated psychological problems are. Finally, when we have passed through the unconscious mind, then there is nothing more to go through in the state of meditation. Then total awareness dawns.

Questions and Answers

Q. Does one need to change their lifestyle to practise yoga?

Swamiji: The answer is 'no'. You can practise yoga the way you are; you don't have to change anything. There is no need to renounce. There is no need to be a vegetarian. There is only one requirement, and that is sincerity. If you are practising yoga then do it with an aim, a goal, which the practices can help you to reach.

Q. What is the final aim of yoga?

Swamiji: The final aim of yoga is to 'know thyself'. Yoga eventually achieves that. There are many areas inside of us, which we are totally unaware of, and these areas have to be brought out. Science today says that only ten per cent of our brain is functioning. What about the other dormant parts? Yoga helps us to go into the mind, to discover what is there, to know these other areas, and to use the full faculty of our brain and mind. That is the philosophical aim of yoga. The practical aim of yoga is relaxation and concentration.

Q. Isn't the final goal of yoga to realize God?

Swamiji: It is. However, one step before God-realization, is realizing your own self. Self-realization is first. God-realization is second. You can put it anyway you like, because once you know your self, you will also know God.

Q. Can blood pressure or headaches, which are very common today, be cured with yoga?

Swamiji: Those suffering from heart problems should do a simple practice. They should either lie down or sit down as comfortably as they can. Close the eyes and practise three different stages of physical and mental relaxation. First, become aware of the outside sounds, such as the cars on the road, people talking, birds, or any sound which you can hear. After some time, you become aware of the breath. You are breathing in, you are breathing out. As you breathe in, watch the abdomen rise, and as you breathe out, watch it fall. Finally, after a while, start counting the breath, in and out; one in, one out, two in, two out, and so on. The breathing should be natural, not fast or slow, just as when you breathe normally. This practice should take about ten to fifteen minutes, after which time you should be totally relaxed and motionless. In ten minutes you will notice the difference.

For those suffering from headaches, practise shashankasana, the hare pose. If it is painful in the beginning, don't try to achieve the final position. Do it step by step: head on the floor, buttocks resting on the heels, hands on the floor stretched above the head, breathing normal. Stay there for as long as possible. Do it comfortably, and then come up. This asana presses a nerve, known as vajra nadi, which is connected with the nervous system, the brain and the spinal cord. It is one of the major nerves in the body, belonging to the parasympathetic nervous system. When pressure is applied to it, the motor nervous system slows down, thus getting rid of the headache, or any other ache in the brain region. By brain region, I mean any other area connected with the motor-nervous system. There are two types of pain, one is sensory pain and the other is motor pain.

Sensory pain is when you prick yourself with a needle and it hurts, when you put pressure and it hurts, and motor pain comes from inside, due to tension.

Q. What practice can you suggest for someone who finds it difficult to calm down and relax, and who doesn't know yoga?

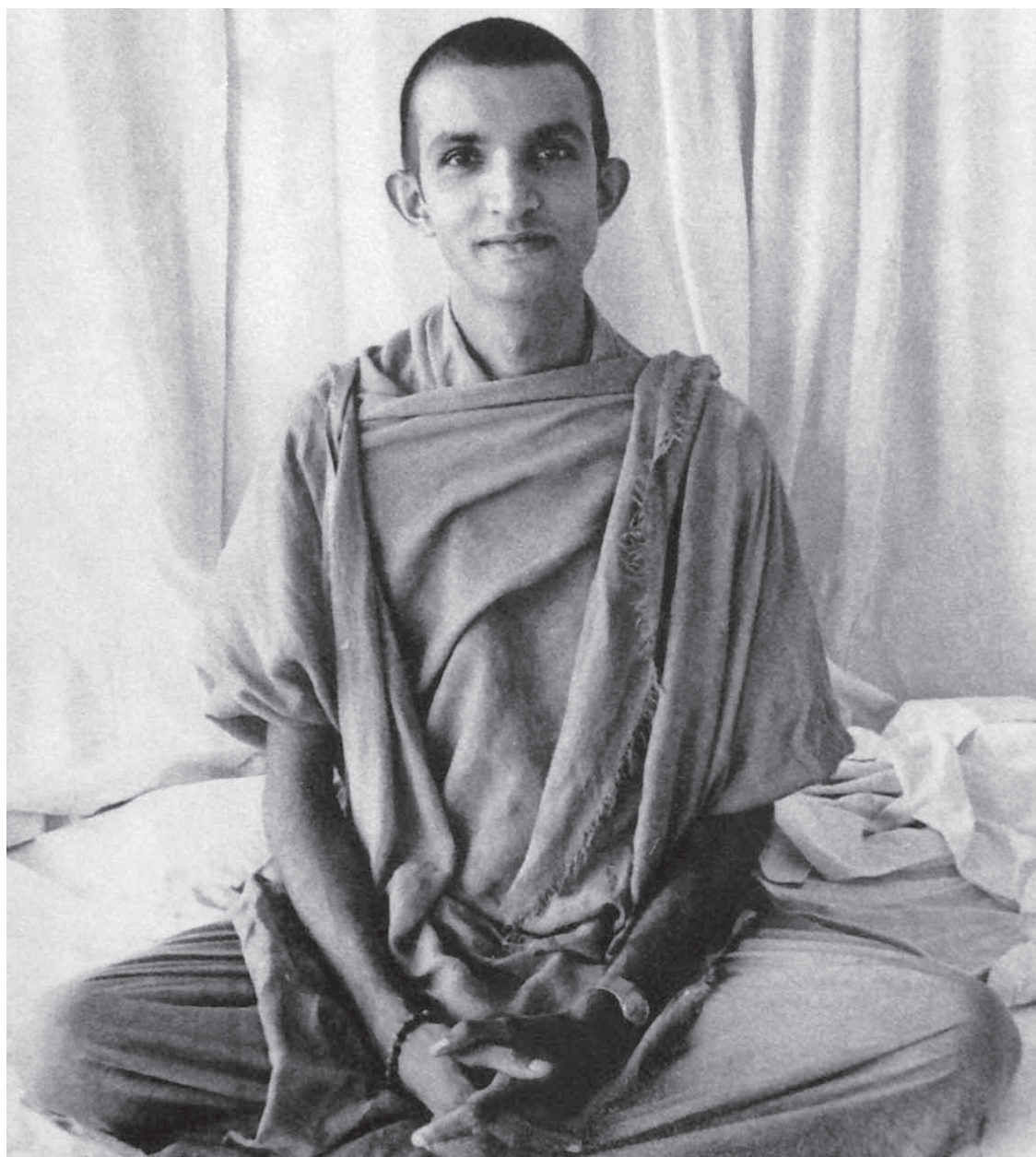
Swamiji: For someone who finds it difficult to relax, the best practice is the one I mentioned previously, which is very simple and anyone can do. This is the best practice to learn for relaxation and, as you practise it, and as you advance, you can change the practice and add something more to it.

How does yoga view sex? Should there be self-control? Is there a tool for self-control and concentration in yoga?

In yoga, self-control is generally applied to the mind and not to the activities of our daily life. In the mind there are many pathways which need to be controlled. However, self-control doesn't mean 'stop'; it means controlling an activity up to a certain stage. There are many habits and desires like eating, drinking and talking. But one should not go to extremes. Instead, self-control, and concentration in yoga, means holding a tight rein on the mind. Of course, it is a very necessary ingredient in our life, without which it would be very difficult to work or do anything, because the mind would constantly be darting from one place to another. We have to apply yoga in the way we can understand and practise it today, not according to its esoteric meaning or its mystical meaning.

Q. What is the mystical meaning of yoga?

Swamiji: When we talk about mystical yoga, we usually refer to the faculties of mind one achieves in the various stages of meditation, in states of expanded awareness. However, those powers are not the purpose of yoga.



Yoga is a vast science, which deals with natural and also supernatural beings. Yoga is believed to originate from the science of tantra and, in tantra, there is a lot of emphasis on developing the occult powers in man. However, yoga has nothing to do with these occult forces, even though it is a part of tantra and, in some cases, may apply to yoga. Many people nowadays also think that yoga is a method to learn how to levitate or walk on fire. There are many such misconceptions and, if you practise a part of yoga that is connected with tantra, you may be able to achieve all these things, like telepathy, telekinesis, etc. However, if you practise true yoga, your experience will be different. The main focus in yoga is to develop the willpower, and once you have developed your willpower, you can achieve anything. There is nothing mystical about yoga. There is nothing occult about yoga. When we talk about the mystical aspect of yoga, we mean that part of yoga which is connected with tantra, and tantra is another big subject altogether.

Q. What is the difference between concentration and meditation?

Swamiji: Concentration is bringing the mind together, bringing the mind to one point. Meditation is the process of moving forward from that point. Concentration is being able to concentrate on one point, without being distracted by any other disturbance, inside or outside. Learning how to concentrate the mind is very difficult, because it is very difficult to focus the mind on one point. When you meditate, you work with different levels of the mind. Concentration is the first step to meditation. Focusing the mind is concentration; introspection is meditation.

—Discourse and satsang at Royal Olympic Hotel, Athens, 6 June 1979

|| *If you are practising yoga
then do it with an aim, with a
goal, which the practices can
help you to reach.* ||

Satsang

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

On yoga and tantra

Q. Is yoga a science, a religion or a philosophy?

Swamiji: Yoga is not a philosophy and it is not a religion. It is a science, which is based on each and every individual's needs. It does not enforce any ideas or dogmas on anybody, but simply tries to make one aware of their day-to-day life and how to handle situations properly. Yoga has been formed as a science for three types of people: those who are active and practical, those who are passive (thinkers or philosophical), and the common man who is a mixture of both. Today, yoga is necessary for people are suffering from the pressures of society and from psychological problems. The entire practice of yoga is based on research and experience. There are different areas in an individual's life, and yoga is a method to control the mental ebb and flow, when one feels low or high. This helps to eliminate tension, worry and anxiety. For this reason, yoga is a science.

Q. Do yogis believe that the yogic lifestyle will spread and be adopted by half the population of the entire earth?

Swamiji: Why half? Why not all? Yoga, as a theory and practical science, will become very widespread and well known. From research, we have seen that it was once a way of life throughout the world. The same awakening is happening now, and in fifty years or a hundred years time, it will again be the culture throughout the world. This is because yoga does not come into conflict with any religion, it does not come into conflict with one's personal life, and it does not impose any restrictions or barriers.

Q. How did yoga start in India?

Swamiji: It did not start in India.

Q. Where did it start?

Swamiji: We don't know where it started but, for some reason, it was preserved in India.

Q. Is yoga in opposition to Hindu religion or Hindu principles?

Swamiji: Yoga does not believe in one God or many Gods. Yoga only believes in the process of self-evolution. That is the reason why people, all over the world, whether they are Muslim or Christian, or whatever religion they belong to, accept yoga as a means of self-evolution. If you read about yoga from a book or hear someone talking about yoga, you will always find that they speak in practical terms, rather than philosophical, because yoga is an individual practice.

Q. Does yoga have a religious quality to it? This is my impression because yoga more or less deals with what religions do.

Swamiji: Would you call science a religion? A religion is something that everybody has to follow, or should follow, for their betterment. Science is also trying to achieve that, using different ways and different words, but it is more or less the same thing.

Q. In your opinion, is it possible, for someone following a western religion and doing yoga, to be in a dilemma?

Swamiji: There is no possibility of that. In South America, the whole continent is strict Catholic and they have accepted yoga. The church there has accepted yoga. You will even see fathers in the morning practising yoga and a sannyasin giving the class. Yoga has nothing against them or any religion at all.

Modern-day Shankaracharya

It is not possible for the ordinary seeker to understand and evaluate the life and actions of a great soul. However, even now at this young age Swami Niranjan glows with an inner light, and the compassion and simple kindness which flows constantly from his gentle and forgiving nature holds the promise of a spiritual leader reminiscent of his param guru, Swami Sivananda, to whom Paramahamsaji had dedicated his entire life and mission. For, like Swami Sivananda he possesses that inner joy and childlike innocence which opens spontaneously to each and every one of life's passing scenes and situations. So, being in harmony with himself, with Nature, and with all those around him, he is able to cope with everything at ease.

Q. Would you call concentration or relaxation yoga?

Swamiji: Yoga has many purposes, and you can choose a yoga which is suitable for you, at any time. Whether it is concentration or relaxation, or even a simple practice of yogic postures that are suitable for you, yoga can help you in the situation in which you are.

Q. How far can yoga go into the various levels of our existence?

Swamiji: Yoga is a vast subject, which may start from the physical body and go through to the cosmic body, and through to the realization of the cosmic energies into another channel. It also deals with all the different stages



of life. If you have a physical problem it will help with that; if you have mental problem it will help with that; if you have any type of problem it will help it. The practice of yoga is individual. What I suggest to you to practise, may not be suitable for another person. For someone else, totally different practices may be needed.

Q. Would that depend on the psycho-synthesis of the individual?

Swamiji: If you call it so, but for three million different people, yoga will have three million different answers, and three million different ways, each being individual.

Q. Can you tell us something about yoga and the influence of biofeedback?

Swamiji: If you are interested in yoga, and if you are to understand what yoga is, then you have to forget that yoga is a philosophy, and understand it as a science that is now being proved by the research of doctors and professors in the field. Take the example of Kirlian photography. In the ancient texts and books on yoga it is clearly stated that there is a force field around the body. They also mention the different colours of this force field and how one can increase it at will. Kirlian photography today is also looking into the method of increasing this force field for medical and healing purposes.

Two years ago, I was doing research in Australia with a doctor. His name was Grader, and he was the first in Australia to do research into Kirlian photography. We

started off with some simple techniques, and took photos before and after each practice. In each photograph before the practice, one could see the force field about half an inch thick, and after the practice it was an inch thick. It would increase. At the same time, there was a psychiatrist who treated patients all day long. After his work, we used to photograph the impression of his energy field, and find that he had nothing around him as he was totally exhausted. Then he would relax, by doing the special technique of yoga nidra, and then do breathing practices to develop the pranic field. Upon his finishing, we would again photograph his impression and it would be radiating outwards.

The same thing happens with the brain waves. In Spain, one of our swamis was invited to a university to show the effects of meditation on the mind. He started to practise meditation with all the electrodes and wires coming out of him. In the beginning the needle showed his state of mind as unstable, with beta waves, because thoughts arose, there were disturbances outside, people talking, etc., but after some time, as he went deeper, it changed into alpha, and the disturbance of his mind totally ceased. So, this is another example of research that is being done in this field.

Q. Are there yogis who can fly or go through walls, etc.?

Swamiji: Powers can be achieved through yoga, but that is a part of yoga, not the aim of yoga. We usually don't recommend indulging in such powers.

Q. If yoga is straightforward, easy and right, why hasn't it been used properly by humanity to enable a greater number of people to progress?

Swamiji: It is well known that they practised yoga in the ancient civilizations. The Mayan and the Inca civilizations in

South America practised yoga, as well as the people from Atlantis. All the ancient civilizations practised it at some time, but then, on account of the rulers, things started deteriorating. This happened in Egypt, which was a very spiritual and a very advanced country. Civil wars broke out, and other circumstances almost suppressed it. Since that time, yoga has remained subdued. If somebody comes after you with a sword in his hand and tells you to stop what you are doing and to do what he says, otherwise he will kill you, what will you do? When the critical moment is upon us, then we tend to forget everything we have achieved, and succumb to worldly desires. During difficult times there is always a decline of good things in a society or civilization. So, yoga was pushed underground for many, many years, and only surfaced five to six thousand years ago. For this reason modern civilizations are only learning about yoga now, whereas the ancient civilizations knew about it before.

Another point is that nowadays science is doing so much research on yoga, collecting so much data that even if we all disappear, there is proof that yoga can do what it says it can do. Perhaps the proof that existed in ancient times was lost, giving people even more reason not to accept yoga. However, with research now, people can see on paper that yoga can do this and that, and they accept it.

To reiterate, during research on yoga we collect various data on how yoga can affect the body, how yoga can affect the mind, and how yoga can affect the brain. When these results are published for people to see, they accept yoga because science is proving it is beneficial for society. If, however, science disappears from the face of earth, then all the data, all the research, will also disappear. In this case, without proof, who will accept yoga? People will probably say I am a charlatan trying to impose my ideas on others, which is probably what happened in those ancient times.

The people of Atlantis used to practise yoga. When the continent sank, they sank and yoga also sank. The ancient American Indian civilizations used to practise yoga, but when the Spanish invaded them with their guns and destroyed the Indians, they also destroyed yoga. Then there was very little proof of yoga left, and thus it was not practised in the Middle Ages. However, there was a group of people who continued to practise yoga, and write books on yoga and its effects. These people used to live in jungles, in the mountains, in the Himalayas, and taught yoga to their disciples. This group of people was also hunted down at the time of religious crisis in the world, but somehow, a few managed to stay alive, and keep the tradition of yoga alive, so that we have access to it today.

Please talk to us about tantra yoga.

Yoga is actually part of tantra. Tantra is not part of yoga. It is the other way around. Tantra believes in the union of the two different poles of positive and negative, matter and consciousness. When we talk about matter and consciousness, some misunderstanding arises because, in tantra, matter and consciousness are symbolized as Shiva and Shakti. Shiva is consciousness and Shakti is matter. The union of these two different poles is tantra, and there are many ways to achieve this union. One of the ways is yoga and, apart from yoga, there are other tantric methods.

Yoga and tantra have the same aim: the union of these two poles. But they have different paths. Yoga is more passive, and tantra is more dynamic. In yoga you try to achieve the goal via meditation, relaxation, pranayama, asana, and various other techniques. In tantra you do the same thing by stimulating the nervous systems with rituals. All these methods reach the same goal in the end. In tantra, you elevate the consciousness by various stimulating means whereas, in yoga, you elevate the



consciousness by going inwards. In yoga you do not use an image whereas, in tantra, you use an image to concentrate on, in order to awaken a certain area. The image may be a photo of someone, or a picture of a stone, or anything. It doesn't matter, as long as you can concentrate and visualize that object as the subject. That is tantra. In yoga, you don't use any external concentration. Rather, you concentrate on the things already inside such as the different chakras or psychic centres.

However, there may be a problem when you start practising both together to accelerate the process. What happens then? There is a mental explosion. Not in the

sense that the brain goes into pieces and blood squirts out! No, nothing like that. There is a mental explosion, due to joining the passive end with the active end. At a certain moment there is clash between these two. Yoga is trying to take you in; tantra is trying to bring you out. In this case there might be a slight confusion with the practices, but the object is the same, the means are different, that is all.

Q. So is yoga better for a passive person and tantra more appropriate for an active person?

Swamiji: No, the other way around. Active personalities have to be introverted; and introverted, passive personalities need to be extroverted. Thus a dynamic person needs yoga, and a quiet, passive person needs tantra. You are trying to break away from the programming of the mind and come out into the open. Everybody's mind is programmed in a certain manner. I am functioning in my way. You are functioning in your own way. We may understand each other, or we may not understand each other. When you give the passive role to an active person, he has to break away from his programming and adapt to the new way, and vice versa. When this happens, you start to understand the process.

Q. How can yoga help us to improve our relationships with other people and not become their victim?

Swamiji: If you practise yoga, even without your wanting it, your relationships with others will improve. As time goes by, you are able to observe more, even without specifically wanting to. It is a process that happens automatically. You are able to watch yourself, and direct your negative thoughts and actions, like anger, jealousy, or hatred, into more positive activities.

I met a man from New York, who is in Munger, India now. When he came to our ashram, he had a ten-page



letter from his father, explaining all the problems the family had to face with him as a child. He was actually about seventeen or eighteen and had a drug addiction problem. They were asking if we could help make him better. We said we would give it a try. When he used to get angry, he was capable of anything, even killing a person. After some time, his whole personality started to

change. Nothing appeared to be different on the outside, but within, he automatically started watching his anger. Once he got very angry and was furious because we threw all his drugs away. He picked up a big log, which was lying in the garden, and ran into the office where there was a movie projector. He smashed the projector with the log. We did not say anything; we just watched him. After the incident passed, he locked himself in the bathroom and, much later, told us that all through his outburst he was watching his anger: how he ran out into the garden, how he picked up the log, and how he ran into the office. He described it like a movie projection that was unfolding in front of him. Slowly, but steadily, he was able to control his actions. Since then, I don't think he has been that violent again. So, yoga does help, and it doesn't make you another person's victim. It doesn't, because your ferocity leaves you, and you gain control.

Q. Is it possible for someone who is happy and does not know anything about yoga, to have the slightest interest in yoga?

Swamiji: Yes, definitely. When we talk about a happy man, we are only talking about a state of his mind which he is expressing. When that mental stage passes, and he needs to face the problems of work, family and society again, then he will need yoga. Just as we have the saying, "Good things take time", lasting happiness also takes time. In the beginning it is temporary, so you need to come back to yoga when it passes.

Q. Our concept of a happy person is someone with a successful job, good health, happy relationships, etc. Can such a person be interested in yoga?

Swamiji: If a person lives in society, and is content with all aspects of his life, then he doesn't need yoga. However,

if he wants to develop his inner faculties, achieve one-pointedness, greater ability to work, more mental clarity, a sharper memory, and so on, then he can practise yoga. In general though, if you are not interested in developing any of these things, then there is no need to practise yoga. The purpose of yoga is not to make one happy. The purpose of yoga is to develop your inner self.

Q. Why has humanity not discovered these simple and useful techniques for self-awareness, concentration, and general development that you are showing us, for hundreds of years?

Swamiji: You can ask humanity that! People knew about it, but they had distorted and vague ideas. Until only a few years ago, when you said the word 'yoga', one would imagine someone lying on a bed of thorns, levitating, or walking on fire. All these different misconceptions about it kept people away, even though they knew it existed. Fifty to eighty years ago, certain people decided to see what the actual truth behind it was, and around that time, yoga started surfacing again.

Q. I still don't understand though why humanity didn't use these simple breathing and relaxation techniques, despite the misconception about yoga?

Swamiji: The way I see it, to accept anything, one needs to have definite proof, and see the evidence that it can happen. Once you have proof, everyone will find it easy to accept. If you do not have proof, then people will consider yoga to be superstitious practices, or practices for people with a lot of time on their hands. So, I think yoga techniques were not adopted before because there was no concrete proof and, even if there was, people could not believe in it until they could prove it scientifically.



Q. Even though yoga made the techniques available and people saw that they really worked, why did so many others still not know about them?

Swamiji: First, because there were no people like you to tell other people about it and second, people who actually knew about yoga were so few, it was difficult for them to tell the whole of humanity.

Q. What is the most important thing yoga can give to the West?

Swamiji: Relaxation.

Q. Is yoga for everybody?

Yoga is for everyone who needs it, whether one is fully involved with it, or partially involved with it, that doesn't matter.



Q. I believe that the practice of yoga for relaxation can help one cope in a difficult environment and face the world. I see it as a step towards real prayer, regardless of one's religion. Is it a stepping stone to higher realms of thinking?

Swamiji: Once you have this relaxation, then the unfolding of consciousness begins. How does it begin? You become aware of what is in your conscious mind. Are you aware of what is in your conscious mind right now? Very difficult to say. After you become aware of the conscious mind, you go into the subconscious, and start watching the processes taking place there. After you become aware of the subconscious mind, you go into the unconscious and see all your suppressed desires and psychological complexes

in the form of fears and many other forms. Once you eliminate this, you start to gain a broader understanding of life, because you are free from problems. You start to see things more clearly, in a different light, and as you understand them better, the relationship between the mind and spirit begins to grow. You gain knowledge of other inner realms. It is a very complex process, but at the same time, you can understand it. It is very easy!

Q. I wish to learn more about yoga and use it to expand my vision.

Swamiji: Try not to miss yoga because it is now being accepted by everyone as a science and, if you know it, it will be very useful. Try to learn and understand it more.

Q. Could you tell us a story from yoga?

Swamiji: I will tell a story, but you have to tell me its meaning afterwards. There was a king who left his kingdom in search of happiness. As he was travelling through some part of the country, he saw a very beautiful city. It was beautifully built and it had gardens, flowers and fountains. It also had nine gates. As the king was looking at the city, he saw the gates open, and a beautiful lady come out surrounded by ten men. He went to the lady, who was the queen of this city, and asked her permission to stay for a few days. The queen consented, and he stayed at the palace. They grew fond of each other and soon got married. Every day the man, who was now king of this city, would indulge in different types of amusement. Each day he found something to make him happy. He was so taken with the beauty of the city and his lovely queen that if she went out, he would go after her; if she laughed, he would laugh; if she cried, he would cry. All the while, he enjoyed everything the city had to offer. He found the food and the wine very tasty. He used to go out hunting different game,

and each day, he used to fulfil one of his desires. Then another would come.

One day, without telling anyone, he left his palace and took a horse to the jungle. He was feeling extremely happy in the city and in the company of people, with all the pleasures he enjoyed, and he wanted to test his strength against lions and tigers, to see who was stronger. During his time in the jungle he killed many animals. When he came back to the palace he found his wife, his queen, crying. The queen was only pretending to be angry, as she wanted him under her control. However, he promised that he would never leave the palace again without telling her, and that he would do everything in his power to ensure her happiness.

Many, many hundreds of years passed and still he stayed in the city. By this stage he had seventy-two thousand sons and daughters. One day he received the news that the city was under attack by two armies, one white and one black. He sent his sons out to fight, but the armies eventually killed them all. He himself then went out and fought very bravely. During the day the white army would fight him and, at night when they were tired, the black army would fight the king. Eventually, they both totally exhausted him. He fled for his life, and as he was running away from the battle field, the commander of the army threw a lasso and caught the king. As he fell on the ground, he realized that something was going to happen to his wife, and this was the only thought in his mind at the instant of his death.

Time passed, and his wife married the commander-in-chief of the army, who knew how to control the queen. She couldn't get angry with him, as he would get angry with her in turn, and he didn't follow her around like her previous husband. He started correcting the queen, and after the queen eradicated her bad behaviour and habits, they lived together and looked after the kingdom.

Q. So, can anyone now tell me the meaning of the story? What is the city of the nine gates?

Swamiji: The king is the Self. The city of nine gates is the body, and the queen is the mind. The ten followers are the ten types of actions and senses: smelling, talking, hearing, feeling, tasting, etc. When the king and queen marry, it means the Self marries the mind. Every day the king found a new pleasurable pastime, with the help of the mind. This means that the Self indulges in life more and more. Then, one day, he went to the forest and hunted many animals. Here he represents the mind, where he thinks he has everything he needs, and turns against poorer creatures who don't have what he has. The Self, with the help of the mind, generates seventy-two thousand sons and daughters. They are the different nadis or channels that form the nervous systems. One day, two types of armies attack the city; one is white and the other is black. The white army represents the days; the black army represents the nights. They symbolize time, the days, weeks, months, and years of life. These eventually affect the life of the Self. He sends out his seventy-two thousand sons to defend the body. However, due to the constant torture of time or, in other words, of successive days and nights, they are unable to withstand the fight. When he realizes that he cannot win against his fate, against his destiny, he starts to run away, but the hangman's noose gets him in the end.

On philosophy and existence

Q. How do we progress and evolve?

Swamiji: We are all in a process of evolution. I will give you an example. You know the state we are in today? What would happen if a man from the Stone Age suddenly appeared? His mental state, and our mental state, would

be totally different. We have been gradually evolving. He would seem very strange to us, living in a cave with an axe and bow and arrow, and wearing animal skin. That would be his experience, but to us, it would be a very blurred picture. As we advance further, this current time will seem blurry in a future time.

Q. How much freedom do we have, from the time we come to earth until the time we go, and during the time in between?

Swamiji: Man shapes his destiny. You can be an engineer if you want to. After that you can change, as you have the mind to do it, and you have the willpower. You have all the facilities to be what you want to be. No one is forcing you to be something. In my opinion, there is freewill all along the middle path, from the time we come, to the time we go, and it is up to us to decide which path to follow. However, we have to use our awareness. Not many people are aware that they can do this. We have to be aware.

Q. Where does the help we get out of the blue, when we are in danger, come from?

Swamiji: Help is very common when one is living a spiritual life. It is well known that the whole world is made up of vibrations and energies. Through the practice of meditation, if you are able to tap one of the sources of this energy, consciously or unconsciously, it will always help you. You can call this a boon, or a process that had to happen. It depends on you.

Q. You can give many things to other people due to your spiritual state. Can you, however, learn from people who know less than you? Can plain people be your teachers?

Swamiji: You learn more from the other people than from your guru. Guru gives you the general outlines and

general ideas, but you get experiences by working with other people. You develop your own abilities.

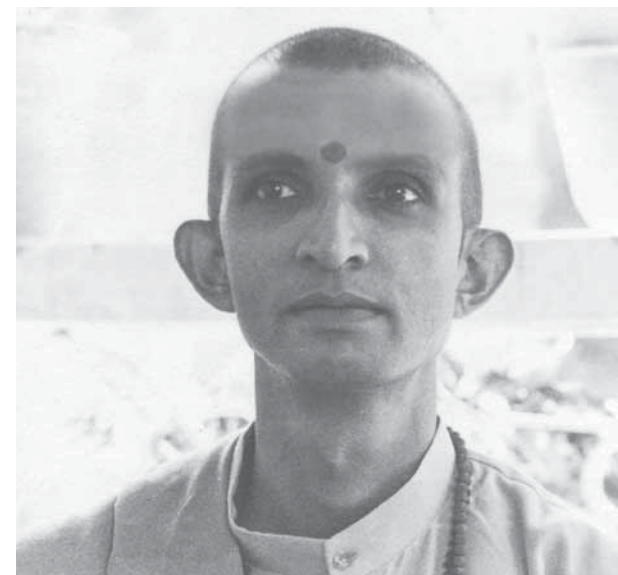
Q. Are you saying that because you are very humble towards everybody, or because is it true?

Swamiji: It is true.

Q. How did evolution start? Why do we have to evolve? What is the beginning of everything?

Swamiji: We believe that everything is made up of energy and vibration. The whole universe is made up of energy and vibration, which is a fact that has been stated by scientists too. At the same time, we are also subject to evolution, because we have awareness. We started out as different individual minds with the purpose of developing ourselves into a greater field of awareness.

Consider the example of the generator which creates electricity, and the bulb which enables us to see the



electricity. We all know that the generator generates electricity, and via the bulb we get light. Similarly, let's imagine ourselves as different bulbs that are lit or exist, due to the vital force we receive from the universe. Think of the generator as something different from us. However, there are links between the bulb and the generator, which are the electrical wires. The electrical wires that connect the bulb and generator are the different channels of energy that flow in our bodies. Now, since we have awareness, we also have a tendency to enquire into different fields of life. Awareness is in the mind, and the mind is always in a process of evolution. As the evolution unfolds, we gain a broader awareness of everything.

There are also many barriers in front of us, like tension and emotions, which hold this individual consciousness together, the individual mind together, and prevent us from immediately realizing the Self. There are obstacles such as emotions, tensions, and desires which hold the mind together. Trying to understand these obstacles, through the practice of yoga, is a process of self-development. We enhance this ability of awareness for our self-development by expanding, or by overcoming, or by understanding, the different situations of our life. Once we are aware of a certain situation around us, we try to look for a way to overcome it. When we find the way, then the process of evolution begins inside. There is no real difference between us and the light bulb, except that we have awareness, which we use to develop ourselves. The bulb example is a very crude one, and it is not very precise, but it gives a rough idea of our situation. How evolution started and from what place? That I do not know.

Q. Could you please explain what cosmic energy is? Do they also call it Brahma?

Swamiji: Another name for this cosmic energy is the force of prana. As you meditate, you become aware of this force,

which is the actual vital force in all animate and inanimate objects. It is the force you see through the medium of Kirlian photography, whether it be from a stone, from a leaf, or from a human being. You will always find a form of energy emanating, and that energy, in yoga, is the pranic force or the cosmic energy. This force can be controlled, increased, or decreased, by different practices such as pranayama or the breathing exercises. To control it is also not that difficult. Once you have achieved mastery over this energy, you can use it for different purposes, and the most important is healing.

Brahma is a totally different subject altogether. Brahma is the Sanskrit name of this cosmic energy. When we say Brahma is everywhere, we are referring to this cosmic energy. However, there are also different forms of energy, which can be felt and seen at different stages. Brahma is also a word which denotes the presence of a certain energy in different materials and objects. There is another Brahma in the Hindu mythology, who is a god, the same as Zeus.

On mind and meditation

Q. How can we disassociate the mind from the spirit so that we are able to evolve?

Swamiji: I don't think you can separate them. Mind, awareness, everything, is part of the psyche, soul. Through the mind we control our actions, our emotions; through the mind we control everything that is happening today in our life. When we transcend the mind, we realize the soul, the Self, and that is called self-realization.

Q. Why does yoga permit the consumption of meat and cigarettes, when they are not allowed in Buddhism? How can you achieve concentration if you smoke?

Swamiji: First, Buddhism and yoga both work on different grounds. Buddhism believes in forgetting the world around

us and reaching the stage beyond pain and pleasure, known as the stage of nirvana or liberation from this earthly bondage. The beliefs of yoga are totally different. Buddhism may say that you have to stop eating meat or that you have to follow a certain rule but, in yoga, where we deal more with the problems of day-to-day life, there is no restriction. Why can't you achieve concentration if you smoke?

Q. Some people take a short-cut, using drugs, and end up with a drug problem. Is there a penalty for that?

Swamiji: Drugs are not really a short-cut. They only help you project what you want to see. The mental impression, of what you want, comes up at that time. If you want heaven, and if you fear hell, you will have both experiences at that time. One part of the mind will be in heaven, and another part of the mind will be in hell.

Q. How can we achieve the state of meditation?

Swamiji: Meditation is a spontaneous process that happens within the individual at a certain time. You cannot try to achieve it, but you can help yourself, by preparing yourself for that state of mind. The unfolding of consciousness, which I was talking about earlier, is the state of meditation. When you are watching yourself, when you watch your thoughts, when you watch your actions, your feelings, your emotions, and the problems you are facing, all this is preparation for actual meditation. You can call it anything you like. You can call it self-analysis. You can call it concentration techniques that are helping you to bring out what is inside you.

Q. Would that be merging with consciousness?

Swamiji: In the process of meditation, you are developing awareness of yourself, and also of the situations around you, of the external world. If you are able to watch it as a witness, then you will be able to have what is called the collective consciousness.

Q. I feel I am going to lose my individuality in this case.

Swamiji: That is only a fear. It doesn't happen like that; you don't lose your individuality, you don't lose your body, and you don't lose your mind. You simply enter into another phase of mind. Your fear is a fear which should eventually be overcome.

Q. If you practise meditation, do you lose your emotions?

Swamiji: You don't lose the emotions or anything. You just become watchful for some time. If you reach the state of meditation, without knowing what your mind is, what will happen? One part of the mind tries to become one with the collective consciousness and, at the same time, emotions like happiness, anger, or desires arise. For example, the desire to eat a delicious ice-cream. This happens when we are not aware of the process that is happening inside us. Many things are happening in the mind at the same time. It is not a splitting process. We are aware of one thing now, but we could be aware of many other things at the same time. Meditation will increase our awareness, which will be very helpful for mental evolution.

Q. How can we be aware of many things at the same time?

Swamiji: Through experience, and this experience may happen in any form. It may come to you as a picture, as words, or as a feeling, but either way, you will understand.

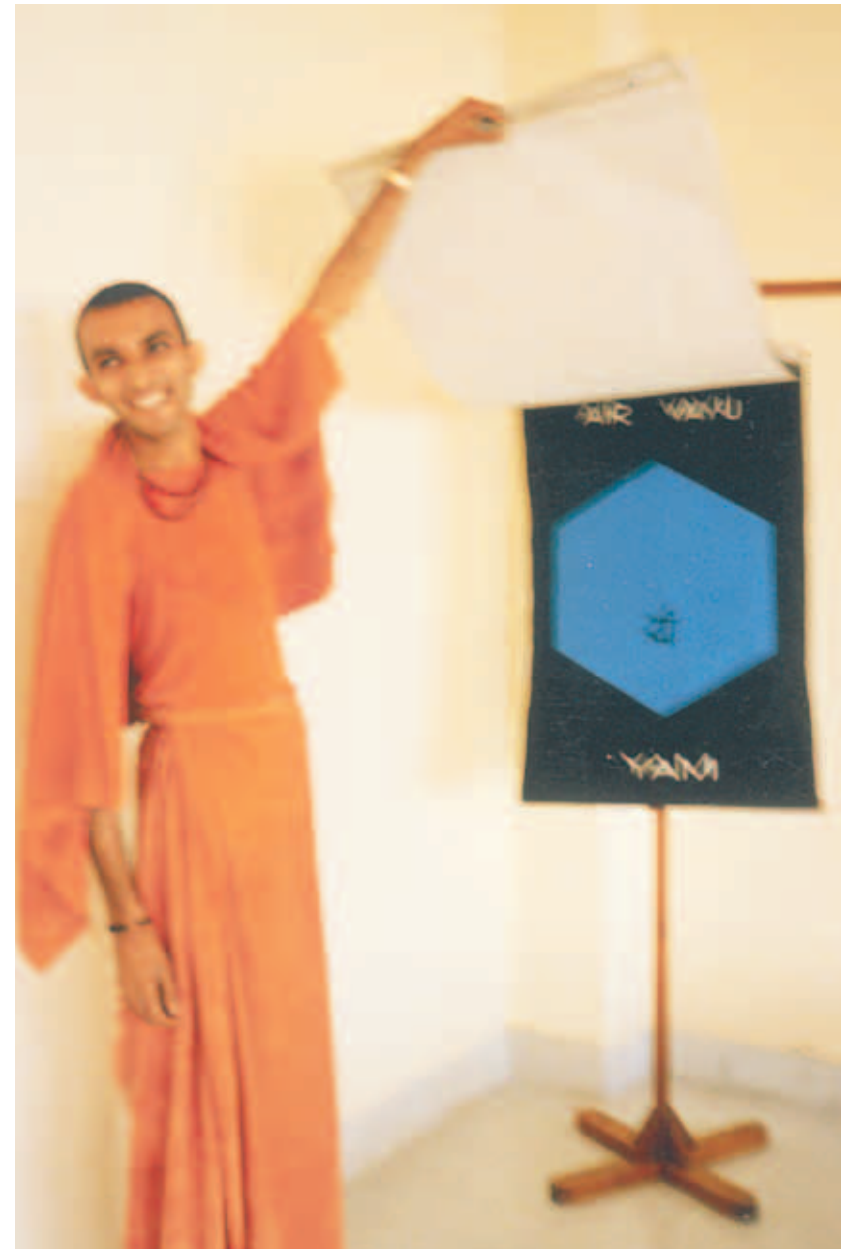
Q. How can we handle emotions like anger, stress, depression, etc?

Swamiji: When we are under stress, depression, anxiety, or anger, the pattern of the mind changes, and one becomes strongly involved with what is happening at that time. If you are able to keep a part of the mind as a seer or as a witness who is listening to you, then you will understand why the problem has happened in the mind.

Yoga tries to make you aware of the conflict that is taking place inside you. If you are angry, what can yoga do? Nothing. If you are depressed, what can yoga do? Nothing. However, if you are able to watch the reactions in you as they occur, then it is easy to understand them and control them. Anger, fear, tension, or anxiety, are all different phases of the mind, and when you are able to witness what is happening with awareness, then you can also take some preventive measures, such as calming your nervous system through breath control. When the nervous system is calm, then you can easily change your emotions. What is important is to remain a witness.

Q. Is the witness separate from what is witnessed?

Swamiji: Always. When you are in the role of the seer, you do things, but you do not totally involve yourself in them. It is similar to going to watching a movie or television; you are seeing everything





that is happening and it can be a part of your life, but at the same time, you are detached from it. In our everyday life we act as the doer, without awareness. If we bring awareness into our life, we will be the seer.

Q. So we need to discover the seer inside us. Who is trying to find the seer?

Swamiji: You yourself are trying to find the seer. What actually is a seer? The seer is one who sees things happen, and who watches things. How does he act? With awareness, of course. Otherwise he would not see anything. This is a part of karma yoga. You do an action with awareness and detachment. There is not a separate entity in you that is the seer. It is you, yourself.

Q. What does 'the world is in our mind' mean?

Swamiji: It is very true. This phrase refers to the projection of the things we do and see, as everything that we do in our lives today is connected with the world. Our actions are controlled by thoughts, whether that action is creative

or destructive. Action is the product of a thought with a feeling in it, if we look at it from the point of view of our day-to-day activities. There is also another side to it. There are many planes of mind, for example, mental, astral and subtle. Each is believed to be a different world in itself, just as the physical world.

Q. Can you further explain all that you have just mentioned?

Swamiji: When there is a desire to do something, this desire transforms itself into creativity, and this creativeness is transformed into action. This action is then connected with a thought or a feeling behind it. This is what happens when we relate with our physical world.

Apart from this physical world there are believed to be other worlds: the astral, subtle and mental planes. We become aware of these worlds as we develop inner awareness, and this inner awareness makes us realize that just as we are living in this world, we are also living in another world and in another form. In the same way that we act in this physical world, we act in the mental, subtle or astral worlds. Everything is believed to be composed of different forms of energies and, in the physical world, the objects are made of concentrated energy. In the same way, we deal with energy directly in other places too.

The mental plane is the plane where all our feelings, thoughts and fantasies reside. In the astral plane there is more experience than feeling, or fantasy, or thought. You experience something which you may not be able to describe here, but you know it, because you have the experience. How does one express what light is? Would you say it is something grey? Would you say it is something shiny? You can only understand what light is if you see it, for the realization of what light is, is an experience. Just to clarify, we are trying to understand this electrical light,

and this experience happens in the astral plane. If the experience was not there, then modern light to us would be as difficult to see as it is for a blind person who doesn't see the light.

There are different planes or levels of existence in the mind. On the subtle plane we realize the purpose of the chain of action and reaction, the purpose of our existence in the world, and the purpose of evolution.

We may hear people talking about different worlds in the mind, or read about them in books, but in actual fact, they are different planes of existence which man goes through, from time to time, and these planes are situated in the unconscious mind. As they are situated in the unconscious mind, we are generally not aware of them.

When we practise meditation, and we learn what it is like at the different levels of consciousness, upon reaching the unconscious, we become aware of these planes. So, what is meditation? It is a method of conscious expansion of consciousness through experience. It is very difficult to understand this. You have to start slowly with meditation and, as the process happens inside, you will understand.

When you asked this question were you relating to the physical world or the inner world?

I was relating to the inner world of maya.

This concept of maya has been presented to us totally inappropriately, as illusion or dream, but it is not. They say that this world is maya, but how can this world be maya, when everything that exists in it is related to different life forms and energies? Instead, you can relate the word 'maya' to ignorance, but not illusion. Often people in South America would say that this world is maya, it is all false, and I used to ask them what their definition of maya was. They meant it in a similar way, that is, a dream, or something that you see one moment and the next moment you don't.

Maya in Sanskrit originally meant ignorance, ignorance due to lack of experience. For example, a child who is ignorant of fire puts his hand in the fire. Upon gaining the experience of fire he is no longer ignorant about it, but before that he did not have that experience, and was in the folds of maya. As soon as one gains the experience and the knowledge, there can be no place for maya. If you think that this world is a dream, if that is what maya means to you, then you haven't experienced it yet. In this world, we are trying to develop ourselves, we are trying to improve our lives, and we are constantly trying to gain more knowledge and experience. It is a training ground for the individual consciousness to become universal consciousness. Does that clarify your concept of maya?

Q. I have heard that what we experience today through the mind is not a reality, but an illusion. Is that true?

Swamiji: What we see today, what we experience today, is not an illusion. You are perhaps referring to the word 'maya', which people use and say this world is an illusion. After you transcend it there is nothing in it. Are you referring to that? It is not an illusion. The meaning of the word maya is ignorance.

As the evolution of mind takes place, one becomes aware of different realms in the mind itself. One begins to lose the awareness of what we can metaphorically call 'closing the door'. Imagine there are two rooms. You are in one room, and from that room you can see the other room. The door is open. This is the stage you are at now. If you close the door, you will not be able to picture the room as clearly as you saw it with the door open. Since you saw the room when the door was open, you know what lies in there, but if you try to picture it, it will be very blurry. If you open the door and see clearly, you may not know what is there, but whatever you see, you will believe. The

same process happens when we say that this world is not real, for we enter a different state from where we see the world all blurry. The word maya has been translated as illusion, but in fact it means ignorance.

Q. What is the difference between the sensorial experience and the astral experience?

Swamiji: Every plane has different attributes. We exist in the physical plane with our thoughts, desires and knowledge, let us say, with the mind. In the physical plane, it is the mind which controls our life and our actions, and we are experiencing the mind at this time. In the astral plane, the mind doesn't come into the picture. There consciousness is prominent, bringing with it discrimination and other faculties that are currently lying dormant. On the physical plane we work with thoughts and desires, whereas on the astral plane we work with the ability to perceive and project. When you consciously experience your ability to perceive and project, that means you are going through the consciousness with the mind on one side and you, as the witness of the mind, on the other. You are the controller of the mind. Mind controls the physical world. Consciousness controls the mind and transcends everything.

Q. Can someone experience these planes, these bodies, through meditation?

Swamiji: Meditation is a process by which you can overcome, or cross, the inner barriers or limitations, and enter totally new planes which very few people have experienced today. Through meditation you can develop inner faculties such as telepathy, or telekinesis (moving matter with the mind), and you can go still further, into the unfolding of your consciousness. After that you can even go one step further. As the unfolding of consciousness



happens, you can realize the Self. That is the last step in meditation.

Q. Why have very few people experienced meditation?

Swamiji: Have we ever tried to go inside ourselves? Have we ever tried to see what is happening there? Once we do that it's easy, but if we say, "Later, later", it will never be possible.

Q. Why is it that, when practising meditation, some people progress and others don't, when they both started in the same way, with the same zeal?

Swamiji: Meditation is a spontaneous process. It is not something I can teach you, or you can learn. It happens automatically. There are practices which prepare us for the actual process of meditation, and these practices lead us through different phases of the mind. There are also practices which will bring you to the point where consciousness starts to unfold, after having gone through the mind. When this unfolding of consciousness begins,

then meditation begins. Previously, it is only concentration. The way people progress is totally individual, and those who stay at the beginning stages don't progress because they don't know how to properly prepare themselves for meditation. For three million people with different personalities there can be three million different types of practices for meditation.

Q. Who can show each person which form of meditation is most appropriate for them?

Swamiji: This must be a guru. Not the guru you read about in the newspaper, but a real guru. The guru has the ability to perceive and project. They don't work on the physical plane; they work on the astral plane. In that plane they are able to perceive the personalities of other people, and teach what is necessary for them. Perceiving or knowing your personality is not an art, it is a process that should happen to every individual. Each person should know his personality, but knowing the personality of others is an art which the guru knows.

Q. Does one need to be conscious or unconscious to reach the astral world?

Swamiji: You will find it very difficult to reach there unconsciously.

Q. I read somewhere that we all experience the astral world in our sleep, is that true?

Swamiji: Sometimes, but not always. In sleep we merge ourselves into the mind. Our experience depends on the quality of sleep. If we sleep deeply, we won't be aware of it. If we sleep lightly, we may know certain things, or see different things, in the form of dreams. Later on you will know whether it was an experience of the astral world, or if it was a projection of the mind.

Q. Are the three planes that you've mentioned in the form of matter, or are they different from it?

Swamiji: There is only one plane in the form of matter, the physical plane. There are other planes in the energy form.

Q. Can you please explain the energy levels to us?

Swamiji: Energy in the physical world exists in many forms: electrical energy, solar energy, atomic energy and so on. In the same way, there is energy within us, but only one type of energy, the vital force. We also know this vital force as pranic force. We see our body, but we don't see the energy in it. Through Kirlian photography you can see the pranic field, which is invisible, but it is there. It doesn't matter if you refer to it as electrical emanations of the body, or pranic field, or vital energy. It is always there. That same energy exists at different levels as well.

According to yoga, there are five types of prana, and they each have different functions. They affect our mind in different ways because, even though they are all energies, they are not the same, and they have different functions. Of these five pranas, three are important: prana (located between the diaphragm and the throat), apana (from the navel down), and samana (between the diaphragm and the navel).

We can relate these forces to different things. In the waking state, our pranic field is more active. In the dream state, the mental state and the astral state, the samana force is more active. We can also relate these pranas to the brain waves of alpha and beta. If we work with these energies at different levels, we can change the rhythm of the brain waves, and by changing the rhythm of these waves, we can stimulate different pranas.

Q. Is prayer equivalent to meditation?

Swamiji: Swami Satyananda, our guru, says that every act in life can be meditation, if you do it with the right

attitude. If you are able to adopt the attitude you have at the time of meditation and maintain that all the time, even while working, driving, eating and sleeping, then you will be in constant meditation. Don't think of meditation as sitting down with the eyes closed. Meditation is a process of knowing the mind, which can happen anywhere at any time. So, prayer is meditation, but not the prayer in which you are asking for something.

On dreams

Q. Swamiji, can you please tell us about dreams in general, and if they have anything to do with people?

Swamiji: Dreams represent the psychological state of the person at that time, and they are a funny process. The meaning is usually the opposite to what you dream. For example, if you see yourself killing somebody, it probably means you wish him a long life! Or, if you are running away from something, it means that you are preparing yourself to face certain issues.

There is a part of our mind which is aware of the past, the present and the future, and that part of the mind is not connected to our awareness at the moment. Otherwise, we would be fully aware of what is going to happen tomorrow. People often get flashes of intuition, or premonitions that something may or may not happen. That also is a dream in the conscious state. When you sleep, and your conscious mind sinks into the unconscious, you are more receptive to what is happening inside you, so at that time you dream. If, at this moment, you were aware of what is happening in your mind, you would see a dream now.

It often happens that you dream something and you know that you are dreaming. Has that happened to you? Yes. Since you know that you are dreaming, can you visualize the thoughts coming in? That is dream

visualization. When you wake up, you remember your dreams for a while and then you forget them. You may recall it again after ten days. When you remember that you saw a certain dream, you should compare it with your past actions, and see if it bares any relation. If it doesn't bare any relation, then you should be mindful of your future actions, and then you will discover what the dream actually means. People give many interpretations to dreams. I don't do that. Rather, observe if the dream has any effect on your life and if it does, then contemplate what type of effect. Once you know the process of how dreams affect life, then you will automatically know about the part of the mind which stands apart with knowledge of past, present and future, and determines your life situations.

Expansion of consciousness is another method to understand dreams. Dreams are the projection of the unconscious to the conscious mind. They can project anything, and they will project any thoughts and desires, one never knows.

Q. When you dream, can you control and change your dreams with the help of yoga?

Swamiji: Yes, but you have to know that you are dreaming, before you can actually change it. When you dream, there is very little mental coordination of the body. When you try to change a dream, or do something, the mind snaps and you wake up, but there is no coordination in the body, which takes some time to recover. When you know that you are dreaming, and when you know that you want to change this dream into something pleasant, as soon as you try to do it, you interrupt the regular pattern of the mind. You don't go against it, but you certainly disturb it at that time. When this takes place, the mind wakes up, while the body continues to sleep.

Q. Are we constantly dreaming, even when we are awake, and just unable to see them because of external stimuli?

Swamiji: Dreams are in our subconscious. When we go to bed and start becoming introverted, we are able to see the dreams. In that introverted stage, if you open your eyes, you can still see, but any activity that distracts the mind, like turning on the light, will bring you back to the conscious state, out of the subconscious. Generally, this is what happens to everybody. If someone is able to not be affected by the light, that is good and something which people should try to achieve. In this case, the transference or the change in consciousness does not happen.





Q. Can one pre-arrange their dreams?

Swamiji: It is possible to arrange what one is going to dream about. As an experiment, when you go to bed, decide what dream you want to see that night. Start thinking about it to create an inner impression, so that when you go to sleep, the same impression will come up in the form of a dream.

Q. Does this take a lot of practice?

Swamiji: It will not happen in a day or two. However, it will be very easy and simple after you are able to channel your thoughts. A lot of concentration and a lot of repetition are required.

I had that experience of thinking of something before I went to sleep and then seeing it in a dream, without doing any special practice.

There is no special practice involved. There is only the thinking process and then dreaming. What I was saying about the mental impression was the effect of it.

On mantra

Q. Please explain what mantra is?

Swamiji: Mantras are symbolic sounds from ancient tantric practices. Mantras are actually sounds which have the power to change the thought patterns or any type of meditative matter. Om, for example, is a mantra, and you can achieve many benefits with this mantra. If you chant a mantra out aloud, with a certain rhythm, it will bring calmness to the body and clarity of mind. If you chant the mantra mentally, with a certain rhythm, you will discover another helpful process. You will find that you are able to control your thoughts and analyze them, and not only your thoughts, but your emotions too. Mantras are also used like a 'rope' during the process of going into the mind, during meditation. If we get lost in the mind, the mantra is a point of reference that enables us to come out again.

Here is a true story. There was a person who was very enthusiastic about meditation and he came to the ashram. Swami Satyananda told him that before meditation he must repeat a certain mantra, and to repeat it mentally throughout the practice.

On Monday the man did it and felt very fine. The next day, he said he went deeper into the mind, he was able to watch everything happening, and it felt beautiful. After about a week of practice, he was suddenly introverted, and forgot the mantra. He was in a total void, and he forgot what his mantra was. In this state, he felt he was getting bigger and bigger and fatter and fatter. Time passed and we didn't know what was happening to him. He was in the room, so we went and knocked, but no

answer. So, eventually, we had to break the door down. We saw him sitting up, with his eyes open, as if totally normal. We asked him, "Why didn't you answer the door when we knocked?" He said, "How can I?" We asked, "Why? What do you mean?" He said, "I'm so fat, I can't move." And we said, "No, you are not fat." We thought he was joking with us. But we also wondered how he could be joking when he saw us break the door down. We called Paramahamsaji. He pulled the person up, and when the man was standing up, he was really cramped because of the pain, as though the room was squashing him from all sides, and tears were actually rolling down his cheeks. We tried to move him toward the door and stopped. He said, "I can't fit through that." At that time Paramahamsaji knew how to handle him, and was able to draw the person out of that state. So, this is why the mantra is necessary, to keep one part of the mind alert to the external.

The mantra also acts as a symbol for the mind to concentrate. When the mind is very active, and you have to concentrate or focus on some object, then it can also serve this purpose. Mantra is a word which has many functions and attributes. Mantra is also connected to tantra, so much so that they say, "Tantra is the science of mantra." Tantra is a process to develop and awaken the inner faculties in man, to awaken the brain to its full potential. So, when we talk about tantra we are actually talking about a process which yoga is a part of. Tantra tries to achieve the same thing as yoga.

Q. If you repeat your mantra and don't have any experiences over the course of time, is this bad?

Swamiji: Yes, but you continue with the practice, otherwise it won't do anything. That person should also check their practice from time to time.

Q. When I practise my mantra, a fear sometimes comes up that someone is behind me, or people are around me, and I stop practising it.

Swamiji: While practising mantra you get these feelings sometimes. That somebody is behind you, or you are surrounded by people. It can happen for various reasons, because mantra elevates the mind during the practice, or rather, conveys you to a state of mind which reflects yourself to you, and that 'yourself' is the feeling that somebody is behind you or in front of you.

Also, many times, various psychological fears, which you can't remember, manifest themselves in some form at the time of mantra repetition. The aim of mantra is to bring out the innate equilibrium and, in the beginning, its role is to bring out all your fears. It is nothing to worry about though. It will go away; it won't be there forever. After some time, when you have gone through that stage, this fear and feeling will go away. I used to get this feeling too, and I used to sit against the wall, to make sure that nobody was behind me. I used to see somebody in the wall also. I used to put many pillows at my back so I didn't feel anything. But now that is all gone.

On guru and disciple

Q. Does a guru want to ask his disciples questions?

Swamiji: The guru is asking questions all the time.

Q. General or individual questions?

Swamiji: Both. With the purpose of knowing the progress of the disciple.

Q. How can we understand that we are moving in the right direction towards our goal? How can we understand what our goal is? Why do we refer to a guru for help?

The answer is "no". You can practise yoga the way you are; you don't have to change anything. There is no need to renounce. There is no need to be a vegetarian. There is only one requirement and that is sincerity. If you are practising yoga then do it with an aim, with a goal, which the practices can help you to reach.

Swamiji: When a man takes up a job, there is always a purpose behind it. If he goes to work it is to earn money; if he does something else then it is with another purpose. If he takes up yoga then there should also be a purpose behind that. For example, if your purpose when you take up yoga is to achieve mental relaxation, then you yourself will understand when you have achieved this state. If you are doing yoga for physical benefits, then of course you will see the results within yourself. There is no need for someone else to tell you whether you are progressing or not. You are the observer of what is going on. You can judge for yourself. The guru does not judge what you are doing; he is there to help you to correct yourself so that you get better results.

On Greece

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

**In Greece, when the heart, mind and feelings are full,
we dance. Will you join us?**

Let us dance with our feelings and aspirations for this country and culture. There are many stories about the cross-cultural exchanges that took place between India and Greece. One story tells us that the word 'therapy' was formed from an association between Greeks and Indians. When skirmishes broke out between the armies of Alexander the Great and the Indian kings, many soldiers from both sides were left to die on the battlefield. After one such skirmish, Alexander and his people saw a frail old man giving water to the wounded, binding their wounds and trying to heal them with herbs and other items.

Alexander asked for the man to be presented to him. He said, "We are strangers to your country, yet you are helping my soldiers as well as your own." The man replied, "The profession to which I belong does not allow me to see you as an invading army, but rather to see people of both nations as human beings who are wounded and need healing." When Alexander asked him his name, he said, "My name is Theravan." Thus the word therapy was born for the process of healing.

So, whether in an individual sense or in cross-cultural exchange, there has been a lot of Greek influence in India and Indian influence in Greece. Due to changes in the geophysical and political environments, in the course of time, the two countries drifted apart, but the spirit that once united these two nations is still vibrant and continues to unite the people. Let us all open our hearts and minds, and enjoy the beauty and growth that life can bring us. This is not only a hope or wish. It can be achieved when cultures, people and countries unite in yoga.



Impressions

A dedication to Swami Niranjan

Swami Dharmaratna highlights qualities she admires in Swami Niranjan.

Swami Niranjanananda (SwaN), a great guru with all the qualities of the real and sincere disciple.

He is the inspiration of heavenly love.

His language is often silence!

His spiritual discipline is truly wise, hard and sometimes extremely painful, but he taught me to love myself and helped me stand on my own feet in order to help others.

May every spiritual aspirant find a Swami Niranjan, to guide his efforts on the right path, in the right way.



Evaporating tension

Swami Sivamurti gives us a glimpse of how Swami Niranjan handled the Greek mentality during his first visit to Greece.

In those early days, the Greek mentality was quite concerned that yoga was connected with some religion, or with a sect and, often, wherever we went, Swamiji was asked quite aggressive and negatively orientated questions. He was always in complete control of the situation and never became impatient. He always treated each question with respect, with politeness, with calmness, emitting balance and poise which, in turn, positively influenced the aggressive questioner, to the extent that they too became quiet, more peaceful, and more centred in his presence, and their initial tension disappeared.

If you have difficulties with a particular person and you cannot understand at all why he repeatedly acts the way he does, then devote five minutes and try to put yourself in his position, to see things from his point of view, and you will start getting answers.

—Swami Niranjanananda

Yoga for Children

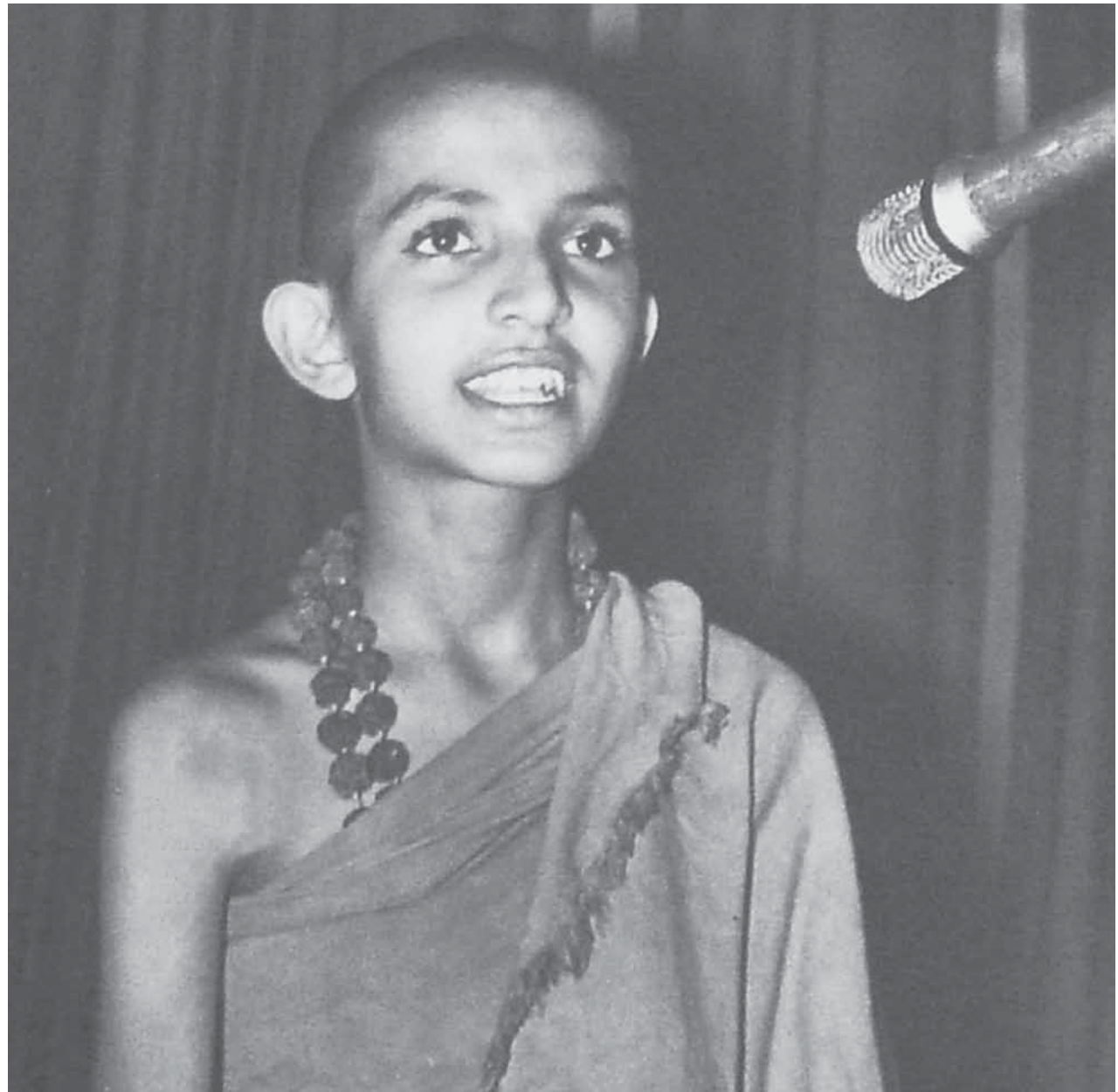
Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

Today, when we are dealing with children, we have to be aware of one thing, and that is how to develop their awareness and concentration. Most of the time, it is very difficult to get them to concentrate on one subject, but through yoga, it is possible to enhance their inner desire to improve their concentration and studies.

In France there is a yoga teacher who has been doing some research, and giving classes to different students in various schools. She has found that when children practise asanas (postures) during the day, they have more energy. Well, children are always full of energy, always jumping around. However, in yoga they get energy which is different, as they become aware of it. They become aware of a new sensation in their body. A feeling of lightness in the body. Through the practice of asanas, they can also get rid of fear, which they often have for teachers or exams. Asanas affect the different hormones and glands of the body.

Through pranayama, the breathing techniques, children develop greater concentration. I will tell you the technique that the yoga teacher taught them. Before the class started, she made them lean on the desk, head resting on folded arms, and she told them to imagine themselves being a lump of clay. They were breathing, and they quietly enjoyed watching themselves breathe in and breathe out. This continued for about five minutes. Afterwards, students who were generally absent-minded or very fidgety were calmer and able to concentrate better.

These two practices are very important if we are trying to help the student develop a greater sense of



concentration and awareness. Children don't usually need anything except these two things: concentration and awareness. So, with the practice of pranayama and the practice of asanas, they can get a feel of their bodies, their states of minds and also of the environment in which they live for most of the time.

Some children are very difficult to handle. They are obstinate and need somebody to control them, and help them with study. A different technique is used in these cases. We ask them to lie on the floor for a few minutes, closing the eyes, and simply watch the breath. When you lie on the floor, the body automatically relaxes, because there is no pressure or tension in any part of the body. As the body starts to relax, the nervous system also calms down. These are the findings of the research being done in France, and the observations of the teachers who follow the development of their students and how they react to different situations and stress factors which their minds are subjected to.

Stress is very common in students, especially at exam time. It may not seem so, because they are full of vital energy, but if this stress takes a hold of their minds in the early stages then, later on, when they are adults, it can assume another form of mental tension and turn into a deep psychological problem. There are psychological problems which we are not even aware of and are most difficult to deal with. If we watch the process of inner development in a child and make a point of eliminating the stress and tension in him, then he will have peace of mind and when he grows up, clarity of mind.

Yoga helps children more in the sense that they come to know their own abilities; they develop the faculties which are lying within them. This, in short, is what yoga can attempt to do for a student or child. If you have

any questions then perhaps we can go deeper into this subject.

Q. When there are many children in the classroom, how can we do yoga practice space-wise?

Swamiji: In relaxation, space does not matter, as long as they are not touching the person beside them. They should be totally free in their body movements. If they don't lie still and they move, you don't have to say anything. If you try to make it into a game rather than it being something serious, it will be more interesting for them. While they are lying on the floor, tell them to visualize a few things: a river, mountains, the moon, the room they are in, how many chairs there are, etc. Ask them to see all the chairs mentally. If you keep them busy and keep their mind active all the time, then they will not become restless and giggle.

Q. I discovered that too. Once you start talking to them, and asking them to visualize, they quieten down.

Swamiji: After the practice, if you ask them, "Did you see the river?" some children will say they saw it straight, some will say it was curved, and some will say it was big. You will also get to know the impressions of the different children on a particular object. How each one sees and defines it.

Q. How many times a day did the teacher in France do this with the children?

Swamiji: Relaxation was done for about two minutes in the morning before the class began; for about two minutes in the afternoon after the lunch period; and for about two minutes just before the end of the school day.

Q. Were they asked to visualize something?

Swamiji: Not in the beginning.

Q. Just simply heads down and relax?

In the evening, when they are eager to go home, they won't lie calmly. Then you have to use visualization.

Q. What else can one do to calm children down apart from visualization, especially the young ones?

Swamiji: You can also get them to count their breath: breathe in one, breathe out one, breathe in two, breathe out two; like that.

Q. Can we play soft music to speed up the process of relaxation, especially after a stressful time?

Swamiji: It is not really necessary. You will need to assess the mood of the children at the time. If you do the relaxation after games, when they arrive in the class, then soft music may help to calm them down. However, if you do the relaxation after a more stressful period of talking, singing and jumping around, they won't need music. You have to be able to judge the mental state of every child, more or less.

Q. How can we introduce the concept of spirit to children?

Swamiji: Spirit is something which we cannot change. We cannot shape it. Mind is something with which we can work and try to understand. So, although there are practices in yoga to see the mind, by expansion of consciousness with the spirit, in the beginning they are not recommended, especially for children. They find it very difficult to understand all this.

Q. Should the teacher's attitude be that the children are dealing with the spirit, with the mind, or with the body?

Swamiji: The teacher should think that they are dealing with the mind since, as we are living, the mind is

controlling our life. In children especially it is thought patterns, desires and emotions which affect them all the time. So, we should deal with the mind, more than with the body or with the spirit. We can, however, use the body as an instrument to relax the mind. We use the body to go deeper into the mind by doing some asanas, pranayamas, and different techniques.

Q. What would you recommend for adolescents?

Swamiji: Their bodies are undergoing chemical changes which affect their emotions. They are restless, not just in a group situation, but within the family, and they sometimes just need to get out and burn energy off. How can yoga help in such situations? Yoga can help by diverting that excess energy, which they have, in some other form. The practice of surya namaskara is very helpful for people between the age of fifteen to twenty, because it fires up and controls the energy of the body, and diverts this energy towards more peaceful purposes. It acts like a generator.

Q. Can it help a thirteen-year-old who sometimes feels like saying something wild, because he has all this energy and doesn't know what to do with it?

Swamiji: When there is excess energy, it also affects the child's mind, by making him restless. If you say something to him, he will not listen, or he will say something else. If he does the practice of surya namaskara then, it will eliminate the excess energy from the body, and at the same time, give him clarity of mind, without him actually knowing it, as the mind is very receptive to different stresses and tensions in a child.

Instability of mind is another characteristic of a child. You can mould him any way you like. If you say, "This is good", he will say this is good, once he realizes it. If you



say, "Don't do that because it is bad," once he realizes it is bad, he won't do it. There comes a time when he has to experience everything that is happening inside him, around him, in the family, in school, and everywhere. If you can direct, or divert the energy into clarity of mind at this time, then the experiences that he will have, will have a greater impact on his personality. If a child is subject to tension from childhood, then when he grows up, he will have a very tense personality. However, if he is relaxed from an early age, he will end up having a very calm and understanding personality. It is the duty of the family to develop the child in such a way that he becomes a light of society.

Q. Is there a yogic technique that can help students improve their concentration and effectiveness in studies?

Swamiji: The best technique is asanas. Through asanas the nervous system is developed, which coordinates memory and concentration. The most well known asana for students and children is surya namaskara, which can be performed in various stages: slow, fast, with concentration on the breath, or with concentration on the chakras, etc.

Q. Does one alternate between the different ways?

Swamiji: When you begin, you simply practise it, without any concentration. As you progress, after one week, two weeks, or one month, you start to become aware of different things in the body: the breathing system, different centres, and in the later stages you add mantras to it.

Q. Do you repeat the mantra together with the asana?

Swamiji: Each pose has a different mantra. Each pose has a different point of concentration. Each pose has a different way of breathing.

When children grow older and enter student life at sixteen or seventeen, then they can learn the practice of *trataka* or candle gazing. These two things are very important.

Q. How can we work without getting tired?

Swamiji: It is not necessary to go to a movie or lie in the sun to relax. You can relax, perhaps even more so, by sitting in a chair and working, if from time to time, you practise a technique to change the brain rhythm. You will then experience a state of relaxation while continuing your work.

I spoke with many parents, asking them to come with their children to the yoga lecture, and they reacted as if it was something bad. They see yoga only from the religious, philosophical point of view, not the exercises. Many people in the West think this way.

Today, there are many misconceptions about yoga, but yoga has nothing to do with any religion or philosophy. It is a practical science for the body and the mind. Yoga is not only *hatha* yoga. It contains many other branches too. For different people, it has different definitions and practices, according to their personality. The aim of yoga is not to renounce the world and meditate, but to develop self-mastery and self-control, which will lead to expansion of consciousness.

Q. As a teacher, I introduced yoga practices to school in a pre-school class, and none of the teachers had any problems with that. I did receive criticism from the parents though. What could I do?

Swamiji: If I was in your place, I would try to explain a few things to them, and encourage them to come and see what was being taught to the children, and let them decide for themselves whether it was good or bad for the



children. It's best to invite them to join the class, for even after explaining things, they may not agree, due to their own preconceived ideas from what they have heard or read.

Q. Is there some sort of guidance on what to teach children?

Swamiji: There is a special group of asanas for children at certain ages. For every age there is a special group. There is also a general set for the different age groups, such as from nine to twelve, from twelve to fifteen, from fifteen to twenty, and so on.

Q. What about yoga for disturbed hyperactive children?

Swamiji: The best way is exercise. You can even engage the child when he is hyperactive. Exercises help to control the nervous systems, and once the nervous systems are under control, the process of eliminating the disturbances in the mind begins. During this period, he may seem more hyperactive, but after some time he will start to calm down, and then he will be okay. This process may take from fifteen days to a month.

Q. How much time every day?

Swamiji: Not more than ten to fifteen minutes maximum. Or don't even try limiting it time-wise. Let him do the exercises and whenever he finishes, he finishes.

Q. How can yoga help emotionally disturbed children – not retarded, but emotionally disturbed?

Swamiji: In Colombia, swamis from our ashram went to a centre there and taught the children techniques to introvert; to go within their minds and see their emotions, desires and thoughts. They saw these like movies, and they were told to watch them, these projections of mind,

and later on, describe what they had seen. This course continued for three months and after that, eighty out of a hundred were re-examined and considered normal children.

Q. Were these statistics really accurate, because that seems phenomenal?

Swamiji: Yes.

Q. Do you know if a case study was done on it? It just seems that, if it was so successful, people would be using these methods in the centres more.

Swamiji: When we started the class, we did not go there with the purpose of studying the effects of yoga on children, which we regretted afterwards. That is what we should have done. From the feedback of the community itself, it was the first time that they, and we, had seen such a change in a group of children who are so emotionally disturbed. Now they are having another course in some other place, where doctors are also supervising the results.

Q. Do you find that these methods can simply be applied as techniques, or is the teacher's level of consciousness more important than a specific asana?

Swamiji: This is a good point. The teacher's attitude at the time of teaching, no matter what he is teaching, is more important than the student's attitude, or the asanas being practised. If a teacher feels compelled to teach something, then the effect, or benefit, or mental projection of the teacher, will not be positive, and that will affect the students. If, however, the teacher enjoys what he is doing, and emanates positivity, then the students will be able to perceive and understand the practice more, and will probably be able to do it ten times better. The teacher's attitude is important.



Q. Should we, as parents, let our children know about various family matters?

Swamiji: If you want to be truthful and frank in your life, then you should be. You should have confidence in your family. If you hide something from them, or don't tell them things, that means your mind is still underdeveloped.

—Talk and satsang at the home of Victor Hill,
Kalamata, 8 June 1979

Spirit is something which we cannot change. We cannot shape it. Mind is something with which we can work and try to understand. So, although there are practices in yoga to see the mind, by expansion of consciousness with the spirit, in the beginning they are not recommended, especially for children. They find it very difficult to understand all this.



Swami Niranjana in a playful mood

Impressions

Swami Niranjana and the child within

Swami Sivamurti

There were times, when he would dissolve a potentially awkward situation with humour, or with a joke, or with laughter, and express his fun-loving side, his adventurous side, and his innate warmth, which was always just below the surface, and came out in the most unexpected situations, to enliven, enrich, encourage, and uplift those around him.

Satsang

Swami Niranjana Saraswati

Q. How can I live like a yogi?

Swamiji: If you want to live like a good yogi, the best way is to follow your common sense, because a yogi utilizes his common sense more than following a set pattern of thought and action. It is viveka or discrimination which is important: what is right, what is not right, what should be done now, what should not be done immediately but can be done later on. Viveka will awaken once you start following your common sense. Of course, that type of awareness should be developed within you, rather than saying, "Okay, I will remember my guru, I will do my yoga practices, I will sit for meditation, I will do my service", and you must set out a time-table for yourself.

Q. Can yoga change our destiny?

Swamiji: It definitely can. First we have to understand what our destiny is, what we mean by destiny. If we know ourselves, our mind, our personality, behaviour, actions and reactions, and we can direct our actions and transform our negative tendencies into positive ones by having a clear mind, inner tranquillity, inner vitality; if we go beyond the normal frame of mind, emotions and behaviour, and if we can develop a better perspective, then we can definitely direct our own lives and thus create a certain change in our destiny.



Yoga Therapy

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

There are some basic points we need to know when we start to teach yoga, concerning the type of problem an individual is facing. These points deal with how techniques should be practised, how they should be taught, and how they should be learnt.

A most important aspect of yoga is yoga therapy. Yoga therapy is using the techniques of yoga to try to help with a particular disease or ailment. Let us look, in brief, at the asanas that can be practised for different physical problems.

Headaches

Starting with headaches, there are different types: migraine headaches, headaches due to allergy, tension

headaches, headaches due to bad environments, and so on. They can all be taken care of by, first of all, practising yogic breathing. That is lying in shavasana and watching the breath in the abdominal region, long and deep breaths.

Secondly, by practising shashankasana. Shashankasana affects the endocrine gland system, and it also affects the nervous system, by releasing the tension from the nerves in the spine. In addition, it helps to enrich the blood supply in the brain. The practice of makarasana is also beneficial for headaches.

If it is a migraine type of headache, then the practice of neti (saline water going in through one nostril and coming out of the other), is very useful. Headaches that are due to bad energy or the environment, such as too much smoke, are also eased by neti. Neti is very useful, as the sole cause of headaches is worry, tension, or anxiety, which affect the nervous system.

Headaches are also related to backache. You will find that if you have a headache, you will feel very stiff when bending forward or backward. To alleviate this backache, the practice of makarasana and shashankasana are done. In the pose of shashankasana, you have to ensure you keep the shoulders relaxed. Otherwise, when you are trying to relax the back nerves, if the shoulders are not relaxed, they will create more tension. Breathing should be normal and if you feel discomfort at any time, you should stop the practice and do something else.

In the case of a normal headache, stay in shashankasana as long as possible, and then move into makarasana, lying on the stomach, again watching the breath, with eyes closed.

In the event of an acute headache, practise different pranayamas or breathing exercises. Nadi shodhana pranayama, stage one: breathing in and out of the same nostril ten times, then changing to the other nostril ten times, and then with both. In stage two: breathe in through the left nostril, breathe out through the right, breathe in through the right nostril, and breathe out through the left.

Also beneficial is the practice of bhrumari pranayama, the humming technique: blocking the ears and making the sound Mmmmmmm. Bhrumari is the humming bee practice; you make the noise a bee makes. This is a very important practice of yoga. It helps to alleviate any type of tension; it is the Alka-seltzer of yoga.

Other causes of headache may be sinus congestion, or constipation. If the headache is due to constipation, then the practice of kunjaj helps.

Kunjaj

Kunjaj is a practice in which you drink about four to six glasses of warm water with a little bit of salt in it. You move the abdomen a little bit, and then you put the first two fingers down the throat and cause yourself to gag and throw up. This, of course, has to be done sitting down or bending over a sink. The water that you drank comes out again, together with all the acidity and mucus that was between the navel and the throat.

One can do it daily for cleaning the stomach and also to alleviate any digestive problems. Kunjaj is very good for these, and also for liver or bile trouble. Kunjaj is very necessary for all these things, and it is also helpful in breathing problems, if one is suffering from asthma, or

bronchitis. At the time of an acute attack of bronchial asthma, the relief by doing kunjal, is immediate. So there are a few practices which work for practically all types of ailments.

Shashankasana and makarasana are also beneficial at the time of asthma. Try backward bending asanas, or any asana which expands the chest outwards at the time of an asthma attack, as in asthma, one of the tendencies is to shrink forward.

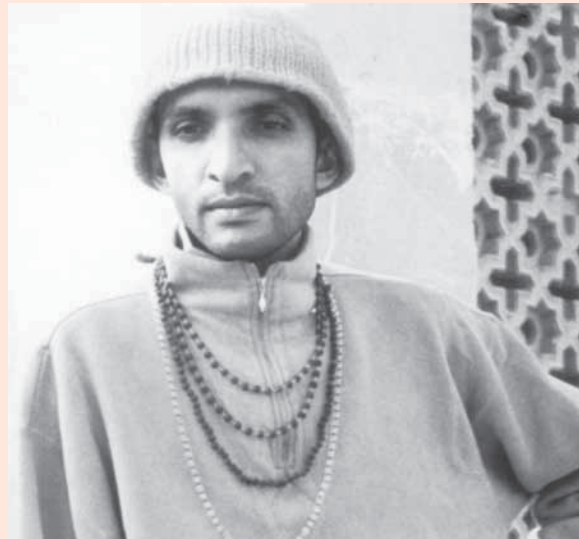
So, we have a list of some asanas, some pranayamas, the practice of neti, and the practice of kunjal. These are to be practised: two asanas, two pranayamas and two cleansing techniques.

Surya namaskara in therapy

The practice of surya namaskara is also widely used. People who do it for physical reasons should do it very quickly and dynamically. People who do it for mental reasons should do it with concentration on different parts of the body and on the breath. People who do it for spiritual reasons should do it with concentration on the different chakras or psychic centres.

In surya namaskara, beginners do not need to concern themselves with the breathing system, but as they go deeper, they need to introduce breath control (breathing in with all the backward bending asanas and breathing out with all the forward bending asanas). This rule applies to all other practices of yoga: breathing in when the chest expands, and breathing out when the chest contracts.

The practice of surya namaskara can be done for many reasons and for any type of ailment or problem. It is a very general exercise, which can suit even a child



or an eighty-year-old. It can be practised for loss of memory, loss of energy from the body, depression, or even the simple loss of hair, as well as for more serious problems like blood pressure.

It is difficult to say where surya namaskara comes from. It is mentioned in yoga text books, even in very old ones. Surya namaskara is mentioned in the text book known as the Brahma Sutras, which probably dates a hundred years before Patanjali.

There are two types of asana: those which are dynamic, and those which are positions that you simply stay in. Asana usually means 'a position you are able to comfortably maintain for some time', like padmasana or sarvangasana. They all come under the category of asanas. However, surya namaskara, and any other asana that is done dynamically, could also come under the category of exercise.

Importance of pawanmuktasana practice

When students come to a class, it is most important to teach them pawanmuktasana. Pawanmuktasana is a series of different asanas for the release of wind and air from different parts of the body. They lubricate the different organs of the body. This is the first thing that a student has to be taught, so that he releases all the tension from different parts of the body, and acquires the flexibility needed to practise other asanas.

There should be control, and we should constantly check the students while they practise pawanmuktasana. The wind, or the gases inside in the body, are in different organs, and with the different movements they may move to another area, or create some discomfort in the body. When this happens the practice should be stopped.

Consider the asana of rowing the boat, or churning the mill, where you massage your abdominal area. The gas in the stomach is shifted and if there is an excess of gas, it will create a lot of pain as it moves. If it is in the large intestine, it will be in the form of colic pain. In this case, stretching is required, like the practice of tadasana, standing on the toes and stretching the whole body, so that the wind is distributed, and not trapped in one area causing pain.

There are two groups of pawanmuktasana: the anti-gastric and anti-rheumatic. If you have practised from the book, the exercises are somewhat mixed. You can divide the practice of pawanmuktasana into three different parts of the body: the first part is from the hips down to the toes, the next part is from the hips up to the chest and shoulders, and the third part deals with the head and arms. The exercises that deal



with the legs, below the hips, come under the anti-rheumatic group, as do the exercises that deal with the head and shoulders. The anti-gastric group only deals with the abdominal area.

For all beginners, whether they are a student of twenty or an elderly person of eighty, the whole pawanmuktasana series focuses on the release of impurities which are in every organ. When we do not lubricate our body, from time to time, without the practice of pawanmuktasana, prana has difficulty in flowing freely through the different parts of the body.

This coincides with difficulty in the free flow of blood and due to that, our legs go to sleep. You know, when you sit for some time in a certain pose and the blood circulation stops, a part of the leg goes to sleep. If the prana continues to circulate, even though the blood does not, you will feel uncomfortable because there is no blood, but the leg will not go to sleep. This is just an example of what can happen.

As we try to cure different ailments in the body, or as we try to advance and practise different and more advanced asanas, there comes a time when the body

reaches a state of total exhaustion. It doesn't matter if you have practised yoga for ten or forty years, the body will feel exhausted from the continual exercise. When we exercise, our body becomes flexible, and the flow is balanced and starts to affect our nervous system. This, in turn, begins to affect the glands, the hormones, and the brain. As this process starts happening inside, the external body in general begins to lose its flexibility, and may start to feel stiff again, because the process has become internalized. At this point, the practice of pawanmuktasana will re-establish the energy in the different parts of the body.

Let us take the example of surya namaskara, which is a very dynamic asana. If you only do surya namaskara and no other asana, the body will start moulding itself to the practice of surya namaskara, and the effects of surya namaskara will be felt in the nervous systems, the glands, and all the other parts of the body. As the body becomes more accustomed to a particular practice, it becomes very difficult to adjust to other types of practices. Here again, pawanmuktasana helps to recondition the body to practise other types of yoga, as well as maintaining the beneficial state it has reached over time with the practice of surya namaskara.

There are various branches of yoga for the different personalities. If you are mentally inclined or psychically inclined, you want to practise yoga more for your mental development, not so much for the physical body. If you are practising bhakti yoga, or raja yoga, or different hatha yoga techniques, the external body begins to slow down and be externally inactive, that is, you have to sit in one place for hours and focus on one point. After some time, the body

will react with feelings of discomfort and tension. To get rid of this feeling of discomfort, which will come even if you've practised yoga for many years, you need to practise pawanmuktasana for five minutes. So, pawanmuktasana is like the battery recharger for the whole body, because it re-establishes the energy flow.

The three main nadis

There are two types of energy in our body. One which is active, controlled by the motor nervous system, and another which is passive, controlled by the sensory nervous system. These nervous systems are the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems respectively. According to yogic physiology, these nervous systems are related to the two main channels in the body: ida nadi and pingala nadi. During sleep, the sensory nervous system is active, meaning ida nadi controls the bodily functions. When one is awake and active, pingala nadi is dominant through the motor nervous system.

Through the practice of pranayama, we are able to change the flow of the nadis, and once we change the flow from one nostril to another, the transformation of energy takes place inside. You can combine this transformation of energy with different yogic asanas and practices.

Energy transformation

Going back to the two asanas mentioned previously, makarasana and shashankasana, let's connect the transformation of energy with these two practices, and see how they work with a physical ailment like high blood pressure.

When somebody has high blood pressure, their mental state is probably unstable, disrupted by many thoughts, confused about what to do, and restlessness in general, which is the actual cause of high blood pressure. The person comes to yoga and, for his particular problem, we suggest he do makarasana for three minutes daily.

He lies on the mattress, in the makarasana pose, and according to the instructions, begins to watch his breathing process. Depending on which nostril he is breathing through predominantly at the time, you can assess his mental state. If his right nostril is flowing in that position, he will be talkative, or feeling uncomfortable, because there will be a tendency to be active. In this case you tell him, "While you are in this position close your right nostril and breathe in and out through the left." At this point the process of transformation of energy starts taking place. As he begins to breathe more freely through the left nostril, his sensory nervous system will start taking over his thoughts and calm him down. All nervous systems will shift from a state of tension to a relaxed state. When this mental restlessness stops, then the blood pressure will automatically drop.

Pranayama in healing

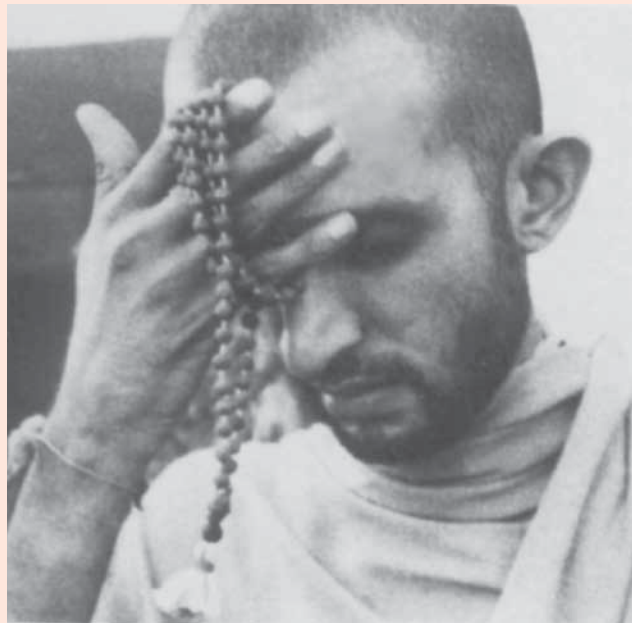
For people who are mentally depressed, and who sit in a room all day constantly thinking, this energy can be transformed to induce active vitality. Here we recommend the practice of bhastrika pranayama as follows: breathe dynamically through one nostril for about twenty breaths. As you finish, hold your breath, and then release it. Repeat the same with the other

nostril, and then with both together. This will activate the motor nervous system.

If a person is depressed, then they can do it only through the right nostril for forty to sixty times, and halve that amount through the left nostril. So, if he does fifty times through the right nostril, he should do twenty-five times through the left, and then twenty-five times with both. When he activates pingala nadi (the right side, the motor nervous system), he will enter a different frame of mind. He will start thinking more quickly, and he won't know what to do. Instead of just sitting, he will get up and start moving about. This is another example of energy transformation. The same pranayama practice can also be used to generate energy for healing purposes.

Kapalbhati and bhastrika are both activating pranayamas. Nadi shodhana is a passive pranayama, slow and gentle. Bhastrika is very vigorous. It can also help in the healing process, and in the practice of prana vidya, but that is another subject altogether.

Pranayamas are done mostly in the morning, before sunrise, or just as the sun is coming up, so that the ultraviolet rays from the sun are absorbed by the body. The rays are absorbed by the air. The air is in and around the body, so the body absorbs the rays. Pranayama is done at that time to facilitate absorption of increased amounts of this energy. Not because the oxygen is purer, or to increase the oxygen in the body, but to get that special type of life force which is necessary. In yoga, it is believed that this particular light energy is the force which enables action in all parts of the body, such as the ability to move the thumb, or the ability to cure ourselves when there is blockage in some area. When



you bump yourself, you get a bruise, and then it slowly disappears. This happens with the energy collected from the ultraviolet rays of the sun. Nowadays, they are trying to prove this in different ways.

The purpose of pranayama is: first, to use the vital force for healing purposes; second, to distribute the vital force in the body, to keep all the parts alive and active; and third, to control the different nervous systems.

Applications in a class situation

Pawanmuktasana and pranayama can be taught to almost any beginner without fear of teaching them incorrectly, because they are the only practices that don't have any restrictions. After practising for some time, when the body and the mind are prepared, you can introduce them to other

forms of yoga. Even if they have some physical problem and they come for only seven classes, at least three classes should be pawanmuktasana and simple pranayama. The remaining four classes can be asanas which deal more directly with the ailment or problem.

It has also been observed in some students that when they practise yoga, for whatever reason, there is a contrary reaction in the body. If they are practising for relaxation, they will suddenly get very uptight, without understanding why they are getting so tense. If they are practising yoga to lower their blood pressure, it will suddenly shoot up without explanation. If they are practising for diabetes, their blood sugar level will suddenly go up. If they are practising for asthma, their frequency of attacks may increase. This is all part of the process that indicates that the asana or the practice is having an effect. The increase in the disease symptoms: having more asthma attacks, increased blood sugar level, increased blood pressure, more tension in the body and mind, are signs for the yoga teacher that the student is closing in on the root cause, and things from within are starting to surface.

I have seen people get worried saying, "Oh! This is happening. It should not happen. We are probably teaching the practice wrongly, or he is practising it wrongly." But it is nothing of the sort. On the contrary, it is good that at some point the student experiences an acuteness concerning his problem. After that experience, the cure will take place automatically.

Questions and Answers

Q. Why does this reaction take place, when one is expecting the contrary to happen?

Swamiji: Imagine a bucket that is full of water. The water is dribbling out from the bucket in small quantities. You put one finger in. Nothing much happens; you put your fist in, a little more water spills. You put your whole hand in up to your elbow and more water spills. Similarly, the negative effects in our body, the impurities, are affected by the yoga practices. Continuous practice starts to bring them to the surface and release them. That is why you experience this increase or overflow.

Q. Won't you be exhausted by the time the illness is cured?

Swamiji: Yoga tries to cure or help from the root itself, from the base, from the cause. It is not like medicine that you take to suppress the problem or disease, which can arise again after some time when the effect has worn off. Yoga works from the bottom up.

Q. What can one do when the symptoms increase so much that one loses the courage to go on?

Like if you have a headache and the headache increases?

Yes.

Then you have to stop. If you suffer from a problem that is becoming acute at some point of the practice, of course you have to stop the exercise for that day or

for a few days. You might be aware of the increased symptoms for about three, four, or five days. As soon as it begins to subside again, then continue. It only happens once; it will only come up once. It may stay for one day, or one week, or ten days, depending on how deep this problem is.

Q. What happens when they are symptoms of a mental problem, like depression for example?

Swamiji: If it is depression, then you'll have to make the person do it. Generally, with mental problems this doesn't seem to happen though. The increase in symptoms only happens if you have physical problems, as with mental problems, you are dealing with a state of mind, which is more stable. But the condition of the body is not stable. It is always changing.

Q. Do problems in the body sometimes come from problems in the mind?

Swamiji: Yes they do, and that happens a lot. There are two main causes for physical problems: one, impressions from the mind, or mental problems which manifest themselves physically; and two, stomach problems which affect the nervous systems. These are the two main causes for any type of physical or mental troubles. If you are affected by a gastric problem, then that is not serious; the gas will slowly come out. If you are affected by indigestion, that is not a big problem; it will cure itself. However, if you are affected by liver or kidney problems, which affect the growth of a gland, or which affect the hormonal system, then the whole body is affected. If there is something wrong with the kidneys or the liver, for example, the glands connected to these

organs, will be affected and stop secreting hormones. Then the problem which began in the body, will also affect the mind, and vice versa. Too much tension in the mind will create a form of anxiety. If you have anxiety, it will be transformed into something else, like fear or anger, in order for you to get rid of it. Either way, there will be excess adrenaline in your body, which will increase your blood pressure. Or, if the tension is very oppressive, it may manifest itself as a breathing problem. Whenever you find yourself in a difficult situation, you won't be able to breathe properly.

It is your decision, your call, how you view a disease and which method you use to help a person. For problems that arise in the physical body, first pawanmuktasana is there to help. For problems that originate in the mind, there are the pranayama practices.

Actually, if you look closely at the process of yoga, it is very simple. There are only three objects: the body, the nervous system, and the mind. Asana will affect the nervous system. The nervous system will affect the mind. The mind will affect the brain and the thinking process. Or, you can do it the other way round. Meditation, and breathing or pranayama, first affect the brain. The brain affects the mind which in turn affects the nervous system, which in turn affects the body. They are all connected in this cycle. Each asana may have a different benefit, each pranayama may have a different objective, but in the end they are all interrelated.

Q. What is the best way to combine asanas to work with the mind, the nervous system and the body?

Swamiji: If you can combine all these, it is very good. For, then you won't have to wait for anything. It will

happen on all the levels at the same time. That is why three things are important. Asana is important, relaxation is important and concentration or trying to focus the mind on one object is important. It is very good if you can cover all three in a class.

Q. What can we practise for a cold or cough?

Swamiji: Simhasana (the lion pose), sarvangasana and shashankasana. As far as pranayamas go, you can do them all, no need to specify any one in particular. Also kunjaj, where the water goes into the stomach and after cleaning the stomach it comes out again with all the acid, bile and gas. These peptic by-products all come out with the water. It is especially good when you have digestive problems, although it can also be done as a daily practice and you feel quite light afterwards. If you can abstain from eating until the afternoon, the effect is better. Of course you can eat, but you must not eat straight after the practice.

Neti is another practice that is good for everything connected with the head. It also helps sinus and ear problems. Be careful to get all the water out at the end. You should do pranayama to make sure that the nasal passages are dry. If the water stays inside, it won't cause any inflammation, but it will give you either a headache, or a cold, which will subside after some time.

Q. Is neti good for headaches?

Swamiji: Yes, very good but, if you have a headache, it should be done with slightly cold water, not hot, or warm.

Q. How can regular yoga practice help a person?

Swamiji: It will depend on the reason you started to practise yoga: physical, mental or spiritual. If you practise



yoga just to practise, without any specific physical, mental, or spiritual aim in mind, then you'll bring balance into your life with more tranquillity, more clarity, more understanding, and more energy.

Q. How can someone practise yoga for a specific reason?

Swamiji: If you start yoga for a special reason, then right from the start you will learn practices to help you fulfil your aim, without needing try other branches of yoga. For example, if you have asthma and try asanas that help asthma patients, you will benefit greatly, whereas if you try

meditation, it will not help you much. Your purpose must be clear to you and to the teacher, so that he teaches you the practices that are going to fulfil your purpose. That must be clear.

Q. How should one approach mental ailments?

Swamiji: With physical problems, asanas always help, but with mental problems, a mixture of asanas, relaxation, and concentration techniques are required. For example, in depression the mind is unclear. There may be negative thoughts about someone being sick in the family whom you love very much, or about work, or about many other things that make you depressed. The mind is in turmoil, and you don't know the way out. The mind is suffering on the one hand and then the physical body starts to suffer on the other. You don't have energy to do anything; you don't feel like doing anything. So, in the case of depression, three things are required: clarity of mind, relaxation, and energy in the body. You can get energy for the body from asanas; clarity or stability of the mind from pranayamas and practices such as antar mouna; and relaxation from yoga nidra. Your depression will start to be alleviated by doing these three things together. Dealing with the mind and mental problems is always more difficult than dealing with physical problems.

Q. Are there any exercises or asanas for teenagers when they all excited and don't know what's wrong? Something to help calm them or help their mothers!

Swamiji: Sarvangasana, the shoulder stand, might help. Or any type of inverted asana, where the head is below the heart. Also halasana.

Q. What does it actually do?

Swamiji: By doing an inverted asana there is an increase in the blood flowing to the brain. If the excitement is due to a lot of neurons in the brain, as the increased blood flows to the head and then out, it takes the excess cells with it. It is like washing the brain, and this actually helps to calm you down.

Q. How long should one keep the pose?

Swamiji: For as long as possible. You know how when somebody gets excited, people say, "Oh! Give him a cold shower!" The same principle can be applied to the brain to calm it.

What can we teach in the case of Mediterranean stigma?

I think surya namaskara might help in this case.

—Discourse and satsangs during the Teacher Training Course at Satyanandashram, Kypseli

Impressions

Getting to know Greece with Swami Niranjan

Swami Sivamurti

During his stay in Greece, Swamiji showed a great interest in discovering and learning more about the Greek history and its connection to Indian history, and the connection between India and Greece in general. One time he requested that we visit the National Museum in Athens. I remember him going through all the rooms, all the areas, looking very carefully at the different artefacts and statues, studying them and recognizing within some of these ancient Greek statues, yogic parallels, as for example a snake woman with the kundalini rising, or the sacred double axe of Minoan culture with ida, pingala and sushumna nadis, the Labyrinth with the inner journey, the Minotaur with the dark side we hide inside, the myth of Ariadni and her thread with our need for guidance on the spiritual path, and others.

Chronicles

1979 was a year of rapid expansion and growth for us. It was also the first and only year in Satyanandashram Hellas' history that we were graced with visits from both Swami Satyananda and Swami Niranjan.

Swami Niranjan spent almost three weeks in Greece. He delivered a public discourse, gave talks



and satsangs in a number of devotee's homes, and conducted an eight-day seminar for the teacher trainees at Satyanandashram in the Athenian suburb of Kypseli.

Swami Niranjan's first visit to Greece offered new insights into the broader dimensions and potential of yoga. All of his programs were attended by large numbers of interested people. He inspired many, which is particularly evident in the way the ashram developed and yoga flourished after his departure.

Following his visit to Greece, Swami Niranjan, accompanied by Swami Sivamurti, went to Zinal in Switzerland for a Kriya Yoga seminar. This was organized by the French Federation of Yoga, and was attended by five hundred yoga teachers from all over Europe.

Regarding this visit to Zinal, Swami Sivamurti recalls: *"Later we went to Zinal in Switzerland where he conducted a Kriya Yoga seminar for the European and French Federations of Yoga. There were teachers there who had been teaching for fifteen to twenty years or maybe more. They were waiting to learn Kriya Yoga. What did Swami Niranjan teach them? He taught them pawanmuktasana and they loved it! It was totally unfamiliar to them, and I think they had the most enjoyable yoga seminar of their lives. They certainly left smiling, and with a fresh outlook on what yoga is all about."*

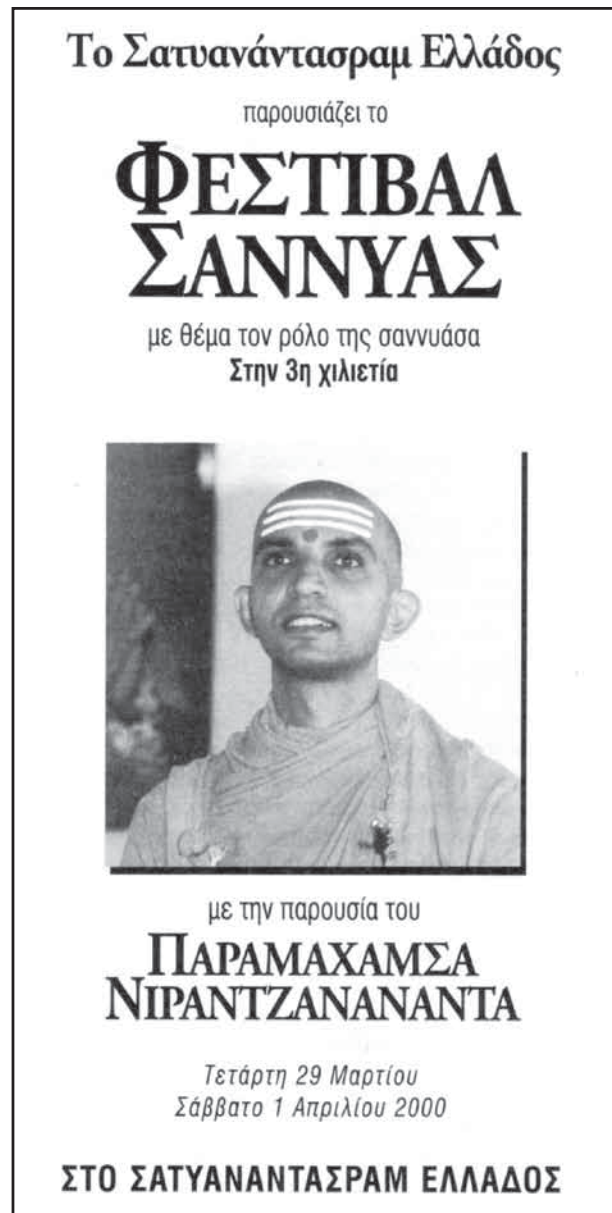
In between classes, when we went climbing up mountains, Swamiji always chose the highest to climb and then, at breakneck speed, he would begin his descent, while I tried to keep up with him. At the bottom of the mountain, when the rest of us were gasping for air, he would suggest a game of tennis. Such energy! And so we would go and play tennis. Then, on the way back to the room, with just minutes to spare before the next class, he would sight a volley ball game and we would join in that. Every moment of the day was filled with his energy and activity. Not a single second was wasted, which makes me think of those lines of Rudyard Kipling: 'If you can fill the unforgiving minute/With sixty seconds' worth of distance run/Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it/And – which is more – /you'll be a Man my son!'"



2000

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- Satsangs on: Sannyasa and Daily Life; Guru-Disciple Relationship; Mind and Awareness; Spiritual Life; Ashram Life; A Roundtable Discussion on Addiction.
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- Chronicles



Cover of invitation leaflet, given out prior to the seminar

Day-by-Day Itinerary

Swami Niranjana arrived in Greece from Paris, France, where he gave two lectures at the UNESCO-RYE (Research of Yoga in Education) Congress and inaugurated the EURYE (European RYE). He stayed at the ashram in Paiania, Greece, for approximately eleven days. Here he conducted lectures and satsangs for the forum on 'The Application of Yoga in Drug and Alcohol Rehabilitation' and the 'Sannyasa Festival' program. He also gave two public lectures in the city of Athens.

Thursday, 23 March

Swami Niranjana arrived in Greece at sunset. He received a very warm welcome upon arrival at the ashram in Paiania. Swami Niranjana went around the ashram grounds, to get to know the ashram, as this was his first visit to this ashram.

Friday-Sunday, 24-26 March

The European Yoga Fellowship (EYF) forum on 'The Application of Yoga in Drug and Alcohol Rehabilitation' was held at Satyanandashram Hellas. The forum programs were attended by approximately four hundred participants.

Swami Niranjana delivered two lectures at the forum: 'Yoga and Addiction' and 'The Role of Meditation in Managing Addiction'.

During the forum, presentations and workshops were held by Mr Mike Hartog (Netherlands) on 'Backyard Rituals'; Swami Savitananda (Netherlands) on 'Saint George and the Dragon'; Swami Mahimananda and Swami Kriyamurti (Australia) on 'Addiction - A Systems Approach' (issues for yoga teachers); Sannyasi Indradevananda and

Swami Achyutananda (England) on 'Yoga and Addiction'; Swami Ishananda (Italy) on 'Yogic Intervention in Rehabilitation; Communities for Drug Addicts' and by Sannyasi Swaroomurti (Dr Karel Nespor, Czech Republic) on 'Yoga in Addictive Diseases - Practical Experience'.

Swami Niranjan, together with all the lecturers of the forum, answered participants' questions in a roundtable discussion.

Monday, 27 March

Swami Niranjan delivered a public lecture at Ziridis College in Athens on 'Give Yoga a Chance in Your Life' which was attended by approximately three hundred people. The lecture was followed by questions and answers.

Tuesday, 28 March

Swami Niranjan conducted a public discourse at the Goethe Institute in Athens on 'Developing Human Potential through Yoga' and it was followed by a question and answer session. The lecture was attended by over five hundred participants.

Wednesday–Sunday, 29 March–2 April

The program 'Sannyasa Festival' was held at Satyanandashram Hellas in the presence of Swami Niranjan. The program was organized by Satyanandashram Hellas and was attended by over five hundred participants.

Wednesday, 29 March

Swami Niranjan was officially welcomed to Satyanandashram Hellas and to the 'Sannyasa Festival' by Swami Sivamurti (Acharya, Satyanandashram Hellas). A play, based on the life of Diogenes (ancient Greek philosopher), was performed during the festivities.

Two discourses on modern and traditional sannyasa were delivered by Swami Niranjan during the day. One in the morning: 'Sannyasa and the Beauty of Life', and the other in the afternoon: 'The Ideal of Sannyasa'. The

afternoon program concluded with a satsang with Swami Niranjan. He answered questions on sannyasa in everyday life, the guru-disciple relationship, and karma.

Thursday, 30 March

In the morning Swami Niranjan delivered a lecture: 'The First Stroke on the Canvas of Life'. In the afternoon, Swami Niranjan gave a satsang answering further questions on sannyasa, the guru-disciple relationship, renunciation, dakshina, and spirituality.

Friday, 31 March

In the morning Swami Niranjan's lecture was 'Learning to Flow like Water'. In the afternoon, Swami Niranjan gave a satsang answering further questions on ashram life, thoughts and emotions, love, sannyasa, vairagya, and other topics.

Saturday, 1 April

Early in the morning, the program 'A Celebration with the Guru' was conducted with Swami Niranjan. During this program, poojas and a sacred vedic ceremony were held by Swami Paramananda from Austria and other pujaris. Initiations took place during these rituals. Swami Niranjan gave initiations (mantra, jignasu, karma sannyasa and poorna sannyasa) to 200 spiritual aspirants. The morning program concluded with a talk by Swami Niranjan on 'The Twelve New Ferryman', in which he explained the deeper meaning of initiation. In the afternoon, Swami Niranjan delivered a lecture: 'The Vision of an Evolving Yoga'.

Sunday, 2 April

The day began early in the morning with a Cosmic Mass performed by Swami Niranjan and the Rev. Antoinette Schoenmaker (Meritus, Independent Church of Australia). Following that, the program 'Yoga Day' took place, during which the ashram opened its gates to the general public and its neighbours. The program was attended



Arrival and welcome of Swami Niranjan at Satyanandashram Hellas - Paiania, 23 March 2000

by approximately six hundred people. Workshops on 'Stress Management', 'Understanding and Overcoming Addictive Behaviour' and 'Yoga and Education' were given by sannyasins and educators. The morning program was concluded with a substantial buffet lunch.

In the afternoon, Swami Niranjan gave his final discourse: 'The Process of Transformation', followed by his last satsang where he answered questions on attachment, indifference, and dancing. Everyone was in such high spirits at the end of the satsang that Swamiji could not help but join in with the Greek dancing!

Swamí Niranjan walking around Satyanandashram Hellas





Yoga and Addiction

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati



What is the cause of addiction? There are different reasons, but the main cause of addiction is a weakening of willpower. The second reason is feeling a vacuum in life, an absence of joy and happiness, a lack of external, social and family support, love and affection. The third reason is not having an aim in life. This leads to an addiction to different forms of stimulation, by which an aim can be created based on fantasy. The fourth reason is the desire to experiment with something new.

Influence of the three gunas

There are two parts to the human personality, one which expresses happiness and creativity, and another which is depressive and introverted. These two aspects are part and parcel of our nature and behaviour.

In yogic terminology, the three qualities which influence the mind are the sattwic, rajasic and tamasic gunas. On the minus side these three qualities are stagnation, aggression and the desire for change: *tamas*, *rajas* and *sattwa*. On the plus side *tamas* indicates recognition of the state in which we are at present; *rajas* represents the vitality which can help us transcend the stagnation; and *sattwa* is the achievement of transcendence. If we consider *rajas*, vitality, dynamism, motivation, as being common to every human being, then it seems that we only have to move between the two poles of *tamas*, stagnation, and *sattwa*, transcendence. *Sattwa* represents a pure, transcendental, balanced and harmonious approach to life.

The nature of the human personality is drawn to the tamasic aspect, or stagnation. Look at your own lives for a moment and tell me whether it is possible to learn anger, hatred, jealousy or greed in any school of philosophy or academic institution? You will reply that you do not learn it anywhere. These emotions are the spontaneous expressions of human nature. There are people who go to different schools of thought in order to learn how to be loving, kind and compassionate, or to learn how to find a transformative balance. This indicates that the negative trends of our personality express themselves naturally and spontaneously, while the positive trends have to be worked on. By nature we have a negative mentality or pull in our personality. Yoga attempts to convert this negativity into harmony, equanimity and balance - *sattwa*. In relation to human nature and personality, yoga works to convert the negativity into positivity. At the physical level,

yoga works to remove the imbalances and to provide an experience and understanding of health.

Stabilizing the mind

Why does our mind become weak? From every angle, whether we look at it from the psychoanalytical or from the personal point of view, we can see that we are governed by distractions. These distractions do not allow our mind to become stable and peaceful. In yogic terminology the distractions which affect the mind are known as *vrittis*, and the state of peace and stability which we experience in yoga is known as *samadhi*.

It has been stated in the Yoga Sutras that when you begin to focus or concentrate the mind, then each stable nature of the mind represents a meditative state. The processes of mind management in the Yoga Sutras are *pratyahara*, *dharana* and *dhyana*. *Pratyahara*, in this context, represents the state of mental and psychological relaxation, and external and sensorial harmony. Perfection of *pratyahara* is determined not by how long you are able to meditate or remain focused, but by how



well you can develop the natural skills to remain relaxed and focused in adverse situations. So, the more you are at peace with yourself in the most difficult and adverse situations, the more you perfect pratyahara. It is said that if you are able to maintain a state of pratyahara for three hours continuously, then you will move into the state of dharana, which is deep concentration. The tradition says that three pratyaharas equal one dharana; three dharanas equal one dhyana; and three dhyanas equal one samadhi.

What are these three pratyaharas? I won't try to define or describe them, but let us begin our understanding by saying that three hours of the same state of mind, a continuity of experience, leads to a deepening of concentration. Three hours of continuous concentration, in which there is no fluctuation or dissipation of the mind, leads to deep meditation or dhyana. Three hours of continuous dhyana, or absolute identification with the inner nature, leads to the state of samadhi, fusion or union with the inner nature.

It is easy to say these things but hard to do them, for the nature of the mind is distracted or dissipated at all times. Imagine a monkey that cannot sit still. We cannot compare our mind to a monkey's because sometimes it is possible for a monkey to become quiet. Now imagine the same monkey drunk. The monkey becomes hyperactive. We cannot compare our mind to a drunken monkey, because a drunken monkey can go to sleep. Now imagine a monkey that has drunk a full bottle of champagne and has also been bitten by a scorpion. That monkey is our mind. We are dealing with such heightened monkey activity! However, the monkey can be controlled by some means, it can be held down, but there is no way to hold down the mind. Therefore, the system of raja yoga indicates a process by which we can avoid the distractions and dissipations of the forces and energies of the nature of the mind.

Awareness of strengths and weaknesses

We should also know that as we relax, there is an increase in self-awareness. Possibly self-awareness is the key in yoga, for as we become aware of the functions of our nature and are able to guide it properly, we experience harmony. As we learn how to relax a bit more, we are able to differentiate between our strengths and weaknesses. Normally we desire strengths, but we identify with our weaknesses. This is a point of conflict in everybody's life. We desire something, but we are restricted by the same quality and nature of the mind. We desire security and safety, but insecurity does not allow us to find security in life. It seems that there is a continuous conflict between strengths and weaknesses at deep conscious

and unconscious levels. We desire love, appreciation and security, but we cannot find them within and so we search for them outside. When we begin searching outside we lose contact with our inner source. Our mind becomes clouded and we adopt different measures which we feel will help us attain safety, security and comfort.

Obsession and willpower

Another important point to understand is the ability to be objective with oneself. Objectivity does not mean an obsessive, compulsive analysis of oneself. The drive to find comfort, safety and security in the outer dimension leads to the generation of compulsive and obsessive behaviour. What we see here is the desire to be happy, for example. We desire to be happy, but when we see



that there is nothing inside to be happy about, then we look outside.

The outer search becomes an obsession which compels us to look in different directions. Obsession is a state of mind in which we crave ego fulfilment and satisfaction, and compulsion is the drive to achieve that obsession. Compulsion is the motivation to fulfil what we lack within ourselves. It seems like a vicious circle, from inside to outside, to compulsive and obsessive behaviour. The first thing that happens is the destruction of inner peace and harmony. However, if we can maintain that inner harmony, then all our habits can change.

Let me give you an example. Suppose you smoke cigarettes and want to give them up. It may be due to the statement on the box which says, "Smoking is injurious to health", or it may be because you know that smoking causes lung cancer, or just a simple thought like, "Why should I blacken my lungs with smoke?" Whatever the reason, you find that you are unable to stop smoking, that you have become addicted. If you try to stop smoking, then the mind goes to that desire again and again, unless you have very strong willpower and do not think about it. Therefore, we say that habits die hard, because that desire for another cigarette is due to a weakening of willpower. Once your willpower is weakened you cannot come out of that state of mind. Therefore, the first thing you need to do is to generate willpower and vitality, which can alter the mental state of desiring and craving.

Research and addiction

In most of the research in which yoga practices have been applied to overcome different forms of addiction, several principles are the same. The common practices are asana and pranayama which lead to a vitality of the body and brain, the techniques of deep relaxation which

aim to relax the inner agitations of the mind, some of the techniques of pratyahara which help to focus the mind, and some of the more advanced techniques to analyze the mental expressions.

Research done in America and India indicates that where there is a heavy dependence on alcohol, we can use very strong asanas to overcome that dependence. Where there is a desire not to smoke marijuana for some time, we can use very light, gentle yogic techniques to create a change. The research carried out by scientists investigating the effects of yoga on addiction is invaluable for our body of knowledge. However, there is one point which I feel modern researchers have missed, and that is the perception of human personality and the depth

of compulsion and obsession which alters desires and behaviour. Therefore, in our research we tried to look at the obsessive nature of the students before teaching them yoga. There was a distinct and definite difference between the approaches we adopted for a gentle personality, a growing personality and an established personality. This, I hope, will act as a reference point for further research into yoga, because right now we are using the same twenty-pound sledgehammer to hit all kinds of addictions. Light addictions only need a small, gentle hammer and heavy addictions need maybe a twenty-pound sledgehammer.

—Talk on 'The Application of Yoga in Drug and Alcohol Rehabilitation' at the European Yoga Fellowship (EYF) forum at Satyanandashram Hellas



The Role of Meditation in Managing Addiction

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati



How to manage addiction has been the topic of much research. An early investigation into meditation and marijuana smoking provides some important indicators about the role of meditation in helping to change one's habits. The study was conducted from January to June 1982 at the Gladman Memorial Centre, California, USA. Dr Todd Mikuriya and I decided to experiment with meditation in the management of mental habits by observing the effects of meditation practice on marijuana smokers. The subjects were seventy young males aged between fifteen and twenty-two, selected by Dr Mikuriya

on the basis of their history of marijuana smoking. Addicts say there is no limit to how many joints one can smoke a day, that they feel a continual need to remain high.

A very simple criterion for improvement was selected, which was no longer having the desire to smoke marijuana. The entire experiment consisted of a thirty-minute meditation class conducted daily for six months. The class began with five minutes of shavasana, followed by twenty minutes of ajapa japa meditation and concluded with five minutes of Om chanting.

Relaxation practice

At the beginning of the class we asked the students to simply lie down and relax, while we took them through the practice of progressive relaxation in shavasana for five minutes. The sequence involves relaxation of the entire physical body, then awareness of the breath in the abdominal region, expansion of the abdomen with inhalation and relaxation of the abdomen with exhalation. We asked the students to become limp like a rag doll and to make the body free from any kind of tension. Then we would check to see if any tension was being held by lifting up different parts of the body. This deep relaxation was induced for only five minutes.

Ajapa japa practice

After the relaxation practice, we asked the students to sit up in a meditative posture, keeping their eyes closed. Initially some would open their eyes. In order to prevent that we gave them eye patches to wear, as we did not want any visual stimulation affecting the state of relaxation in the brain. We then guided the students in the practice of ajapa japa for twenty minutes.

Ajapa japa is a practice in which deepening of concentration and internalization of awareness takes place. We began by witnessing the flow of the natural

breath in the nasal passage. The actual flow of the breath in the nostrils was experienced by focusing the mind on the temperature of the breath during inhalation and exhalation, intensifying awareness of the cool sensation within the nostrils at the time of inhalation and the warm sensation within the nostrils at the time of exhalation.

At the time of the study, it was my understanding that concentration on the temperature of the air going in and out of the nostrils helps to balance the activities of the two brain hemispheres. In hatha yoga it is said that the flow of the breath is connected with the activation of the left and right hemispheres of the brain. The flow in the right nostril stimulates the left hemisphere and the flow in the left nostril stimulates the right hemisphere.

Subsequent research has shown that the flow of the breath in the different nostrils stimulates and alters the functions of the different brain hemispheres. In yogic theory the right nostril is the location of pingala nadi, the source of heat and vitality, and the left nostril is the location of ida nadi, the source of coolness and tranquillity. Therefore, it was my contention that if we were able to merge the mind with the experience of breathing and the temperature of the breath, it would be possible to induce changes in the patterns of the brain waves. This can be achieved through concentration and awareness of the fact that one is breathing in and out, and observing the temperature of the breath.

You can also do an experiment, not here because the environment is already peaceful, but in an environment where there is a lot of stimulation and stress, so you will see the result. At home or at work, when you are mentally and emotionally fatigued, feeling tired and drained of vitality, and there is nervous, muscular and emotional tension, simply close your eyes for a few minutes. Watch the flow of the breath in the nostrils and observe the



Round table discussion, European Yoga Fellowship forum, "The application of yoga in alcohol rehabilitation", Satyanandashram-Paiania, April 2000.

temperature of the breath. By doing this you will feel a lot calmer and more in control of yourself and your expressions. This experiment will allow you to experience the change in the pattern of the brain waves, which you will feel subjectively as greater relaxation and control over the personal, emotional and intellectual expressions.

After observing the breath in the nostrils, we then asked the students to become aware of the movement of the breath in the frontal passage between the nose and the navel. Normally, when we breathe in, the air goes down into the lungs and when we breathe out the air comes up out of the lungs. However, in the practice of ajapa japa we reverse the awareness factor, so at the time of inhalation the students had to imagine the breath was ascending from the navel to the nostrils and at the

time of exhalation that the breath was descending from the nostrils to the navel. This practice internalized their attention and awareness so deeply that there would come a time when they would stop hearing the noises outside, although their ears were not blocked. By keeping the eyes closed, or by wearing eye patches, there was visual deprivation, and by observing the flow of the breath there was reduction in auditory perception.

We then introduced the component of mantra repetition with the breath. In ajapa japa the mantra So-Ham is used. So represents the sound of inhalation and Ham represents the sound of exhalation. The mantra creates a change in the vibratory dimension of the personality, which has the effect of making the mind more focused, tranquil and peaceful. After the students had practised mantra repetition with

the breath for five to seven minutes, we ended the practice of ajapa japa. The students then chanted Om verbally for five minutes, still keeping their eyes closed. This ended the thirty-minute class.

Improvements observed

No longer having any desire to smoke marijuana was the criterion selected for improvement. The results indicated that during the six months the majority of students showed this improvement. After one month of meditation practice, six reported that they no longer felt any desire to smoke and three that they had reduced their intake. After two months another ten reported that they had stopped smoking and twenty that they were smoking less. After three months a further nineteen reported that they had

reduced their smoking and fourteen no longer wanted to smoke. After four months another eight reported that they had stopped and six that they were smoking less. After five months another eleven had reduced their smoking and ten reported they had stopped. At the end of the six months, another seven no longer had the desire to smoke, four more had reduced their intake and eleven still showed no change. So, during the six months, fifty-five of the initial seventy students reported no longer having any desire to smoke marijuana.

Family background

In order to find out why most subjects improved while a few did not, Dr Mikuriya decided to investigate their family backgrounds. He found that the eleven students who had shown no improvement had major problems with their parents. There were cases of violence in the family, or the parents had separated and the children had been left to



fend for themselves with no source of affection, support and security.

Another interesting point to emerge was that the fifty-five subjects who had shown improvement all had very good family environments, with parental support, consideration and kindness from other family members. They reported that they had been lured into smoking with the idea of experimenting with something new.

It has been our experience that even those people who come from very disturbed family backgrounds can

be helped in an ashram environment. For such people the ashram creates an environment of security and care, which helps them to manage their habits and addictions more efficiently.

The role of meditation

We often tend to think that meditation is a process of spiritual enlightenment or greater spiritual understanding, but meditation is a very big subject. In English, the word 'meditation' represents a state of mental attention; it is not a means of attaining tranquillity, but a method of becoming more attentive internally. We can even say that



mental attention equals meditation. When you become attentive internally, you are forced to become a witness to what is transpiring in your inner personality. If I ask you to observe your thoughts, what are you doing? You are not in a deep meditative state when you are observing your thoughts; rather, you have become alert and aware of a mental process.

Yoga says that nobody in this world has been able to experience meditation. We only experience different or varying degrees of concentration, focusing and alertness,

but nobody can experience meditation because it is a state of mind beyond the realm of time, space and object. So we do not meditate. We try to understand what we are feeling in the realm of emotions and intellect, and the social influences on our personality.

Paramahamsaji has said many times that in the state of meditation, the meditator, the object of meditation and the experience of meditation become one. When we start yoga, we see the three clear divisions of pratyahara, dharana and dhyana. These practices indicate development of an attentive awareness that makes us realize the inner and outer interactions of an individual. Once we are able to become attentive to our own difficulties, restrictions, limitations and problems, then often we are able to manage them spontaneously and more naturally. If there is a psychological imbalance, a feeling of not being loved or wanted, of being restricted, then when you begin to observe that imbalance, you naturally find a balance. This attentive awareness is recognized as the observer, the drashta or seer in yoga philosophy.

Take a look at yourself and you will see others differently.



Put your hands in the hands of the man from Galilee.

This song indicates the process of yoga that allows us to perceive ourselves in our natural, optimistic form. Difficulties in life come when we are unable to understand a problem and our responses to it. Then all our expressions become reactions to something that we are unable to adjust to or understand. We react to our family, our social conditioning, our social environment, and we react against ourselves by becoming self-destructive. In order to appreciate the qualities within one's self, to understand

the situations that influence us, self-observation and awareness of personal responses is necessary, and that can happen through meditation.

The lesson today is that there is no escaping from the realities, but we must understand and accept what exists within and around us. Therefore, adjust, adapt and express the best in yourself.

—Talk at the European Yoga Fellowship (EYF) forum
at Satyanandashram Hellas

Give yoga a chance in your life

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

Bring you greetings from the ancient land of India and from the ancient culture of yoga. It is a privilege and an honour to be here with you today to discuss the subject of developing human potential through yoga. In this creation and life the human being is the centre of all experiences. It is the human being, through the use of the various faculties of head, heart and hands, that develops life externally and internally. It is the human being who, with

the proper utilization of their faculties, finds an expression which can be construed as artistic, creative, philosophical, material, scientific or spiritual.

Yoga has recognized that there are immense possibilities of human growth in all dimensions: social, physical, emotional and psychic. Yoga is not Indian or eastern. Rather, it is the heritage of humanity, which has looked into the development of its own personality and nature. There has been ample evidence in the past civilizations of South America, Northern Europe, and Asia that indicate the prevalence of yogic practices. Research was done from 1973 to 1975 in South America, and evidence was uncovered in the form of statues and writing of yogic practices. This evidence dates back five or six thousand years BC. Similar images, statues, and

impressions have been found in other cultures and civilizations of the past, which indicate that yoga was once upon a time a worldwide practice, culture and lifestyle. As it happens with the rise and fall of civilizations, the social systems were destroyed. In this process, the philosophy and the practice of yoga was lost around the world. However, it was preserved in India. It was so well preserved in India that even the Indians did not know that yoga existed. It is only in the last fifty years that yoga has come to the forefront of Indian society. Prior to that we had a concept that yoga was a practice which was performed by renunciates and fakirs, and that they did things like sitting on a bed of nails in order to achieve psychic powers or some form of control over matter.

I have spent thirty-five years of my life practising, understanding and discovering the process of yoga, and from my understanding and experience, I can tell you that yoga gives one the ability not to float on water, or to fly in the air, or to read people's thoughts, but the ability, the strength, and the courage to stand on one's own two feet. The ability to stand on one's feet represents a connection which we find and develop. It is a connection that happens between the body and mind, between the mind and spirit. This connection is experienced in the form of bringing together the faculties of the head: the intelligence, the heart: emotions and feelings, and the hands: performance and action. This connection or this unification between the various dimensions of the human personality is yoga. Yoga means union. Philosophically, some people interpret yoga as the union of the individual self with the Cosmic Self. It's a very interesting and good idea, but so far I have not experienced it. However, what I have been able to experience is that human creativity can manifest in all aspects and areas of life. The practice of yoga can lead us to the experience of health in the



physical dimension, the experience of tranquillity in the mental dimension, and the experience of a developed awareness in the spiritual dimension.

Today we recognize that the body, mind and spirit are integrated with each other. There is no division and there is no separation. The body is the manifest aspect, the manifest experience in the realm of matter. The body indicates the experience of life in the realm of matter. The mind is the subtle force within the body, and it expresses itself uniquely in each and every individual. The spirit is the substance and foundation for the development of life. In order to explain to you the concept of life as a whole, yoga uses the example of a tree.

The symbol of the tree that is used in yoga is a very interesting one. We look at a tree and what do we see? We see the trunk and the branches. In relation to ourselves, the trunk and the branches are the body and the senses. We see the leaves, the flowers and the fruits. In relation to ourselves, the leaves are the aspirations, the thoughts and the desires. The flowers are the qualities and expressions of life. The fruits are the achievements and attainments of life, which we recognize as success and failure. However, can the tree survive without the roots? And are the roots seen with the naked eye? The roots are underground and they cannot be seen, but it is the roots which sustain and nourish the life in a tree. Just as the roots are the foundation and cause for the growth of the tree and all the various expressions that we see in a tree, the spirit is the cause and the source of development of life and all the expressions that we realize, understand and appreciate in life.

Yoga has always seen that the entire life has to be realized in order to experience wholeness and completeness. Therefore, in yoga you will find three definite and distinct systems. One which deals with

the body and the attainment of health, another which deals with mind and the attainment of inner peace and tranquillity, and a third which deals with the spirit and the attainment of a deeper and more enlightened awareness. Despite belief to the contrary, yoga is not just a set of physical practices or postures. Those of you who have had the opportunity to look into the subject of yoga, would have come across the literary and classical work of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras. This classical work of yoga was written about five thousand years ago and it begins with a few simple statements. It begins with the statement that yoga is a form of discipline. This is the first statement of the book. The second statement is that through this discipline you gain the ability to control and direct the patterns and the behaviour of your mind. The third statement is that once you are able to control the expressions of your mind, you are able to direct the experiences of your mind, and you are in tune with your inner nature. These are the three statements which have become the foundation for the development of yogic traditions and systems.

What is the role of discipline in yoga? And what do we mean when we say 'discipline'? In a modern context, discipline means an organized structure of life. In physical terms, discipline means following a pattern in which our body is accommodated according to its biorhythms. In general terms, discipline means following a system or pattern in which there is no imbalance. However, discipline is not a routine which you adhere to. Rather, according to yoga it is the control of the subtle expressions which manifest externally in our thoughts, behaviour and actions. Discipline in yoga is the awareness of the subtle expressions, experiences and realization of the inner personality. However, this inner personality is not without the support of the physical body. In order to develop an understanding of the body, as it relates to the inner

personality, yogis evolved and developed a system of physical practices, which are known as postures or asanas.

Researchers and scientists who have experimented with the postures to see their effect on the human body and mind, have discovered that even with the simplest practices, the greatest imbalances can be removed from the body and mind. Imbalances which occur in the body, and are recognized as illnesses and diseases, are helped with asanas or the physical postures. Imbalances which occur in the realm of vitality and energy are balanced with the practices of breathing techniques and pranayamas. These researchers have worked with different illnesses such as diabetes, asthma, digestive disorders, circulatory



problems, and even cancer. They have found that the right application of yoga can help effectively manage such illnesses. There is a lot of scientific evidence now which proves that disease can be removed from the body, and that the body can then experience total health.

How does this happen? Science will give you its answer by saying that the imbalances created are due to our sedentary lifestyle, stress and tensions, which afflict the performance of the internal organs. However, from the yogic perspective, health is attained because we become aware of the needs of the body, and we are able to adjust and tune the biorhythms of the body to our lifestyle and environment, and thus we experience health.

Then there is the mental dimension of yoga. This is possibly the most important aspect of yoga, because the human mind has always been a mystery. How does the mind behave? How does the mind work? How does the mind interact with other people and the environment? How does the mind attain wisdom? And how does the mind realize itself? There are no absolute answers, only an ongoing process of discovery. In our life we can see that the mind plays a very important role in our expressions and behaviour in life. However, how do we train and awaken the potential of the mind through yoga? People who study yoga say that it is necessary to control the mind, but people who practise yoga say that it is not necessary to control the mind; rather, it is necessary to become friendly with the mind.

Our guru used to tell me stories when I was small, and one day he told me the story of four wild horses that were given as gifts to a king. The horses were totally wild and had not been trained at all. They were beautiful, but nobody could ride them. One day the emperor made a proclamation throughout the land that anyone who could train these wild horses would receive a lot of wealth and

prizes. Many people came out of greed and tried their luck, but the horses proved stronger than the trainers. After many years, the king gave up hope of anyone riding these beautiful horses, as nobody was able to train them. However, one day a man came and said, "Give me an opportunity. I will try to train them, but only on one condition. Leave them free, and I shall take their charge for one year. After one year, I shall bring them back to you." The king said, "All right. You can try." He gave him the four horses and the man took them away. After one year the king saw this man riding on one of the horses, with the other three horses obediently following him. The king was surprised and said, "How did you succeed where so many great trainers had failed?" The man said, "Well, I did not do anything. I simply made friends with these horses. I let them be free. When they ran I used to run with them; when they stopped I would stop; when they drank water I would drink coffee and tea; and when they ate grass I would eat my spaghetti and pasta. Eventually they recognized me as one of them, and one day they came and nuzzled against me. I touched them, but they did not like it. However, later on they got used to it. One day I put on a bridle, but they did not like it. However, later on they got used to it as they trusted me. Then one day I put a saddle on. They did not appreciate it, but then they got used to it. Then one day I sat on one of them. They did not like it, but then they got used to it. Thus, when I became friends with them, they became friends with me, and accepted me."

As you know, once you become friendly with yourself, you remove the fears, insecurities, anxieties and stresses that afflict the mind, and you are able to direct the mind. I do not have to tell the story of the four wild horses to the Greek people because they have the story of Alexander the Great. Remember when he was given a horse? The

horse was afraid of its own shadow and nobody could ride it. What did Alexander do? He simply turned the horse around, and when the horse saw his own shadow and was not frightened by it, he allowed Alexander to ride him. What do these stories indicate? They show us that we have to allow the fears and insecurities of the mind to leave before we are able to direct the mind. However, to say that it can happen through meditation is not enough, for meditation is a very big subject.

Yoga recognizes different dimensions in the meditation process. In the first dimension of meditation, yoga says observe the nature of your mind. Observe the pattern of your thoughts, observe the pattern of your behaviour, know that thoughts are coming and going, they are manifesting and exist within you. It may be a restrictive negative mentality at first, or it may be a positive uplifting mentality, but realize that these differences exist. If you are truthful to yourself, you will know that you always hide away from yourself. The negativities of the mind influence us and we hide from those negativities. We try to suppress many of the restrictive dimensions of our mind, as we feel very uncomfortable. Yet they are part of our personality and we have to recognize them as part of our personality. Therefore, the first dimension is recognition of the mental states as they exist, without shying away from them, without shunning them, and without repressing them. At the same time, we try to relax in this state of recognition. There should be no tension, anxiety or frustration; there should be acceptance, and there should be relaxation.

In the second dimension of meditation, we try to focus our mind; we try to concentrate our mind on one experience. Then, in the third dimension, we try to intensify the state of focusing and concentration. In the fourth stage, we begin to meditate. This is the recognition and transformation of the restrictive nature into an optimistic



and positive expression. This is the mental dimension of yoga, which allows us to experience inner relaxation and tranquillity. It allows us to develop self-confidence, self-esteem and appreciation of life. It allows us to become aware of human actions and qualities for the development and upliftment of our personal and social lives. This is the beginning of the yogic process in our life, which leads to a greater harmony of body, mind and spirit, and to a greater appreciation of life and our expressions in it.

According to yoga, when the body and mind are in harmony with each other, then the state of harmony is recognized as a spiritual experience. This spiritual experience is the understanding of joy and beauty that exists within us and around us. The experience of joy and the appreciation of beauty nourish our mind and body. This is how, through yoga, an attempt is made to understand our role in life.

Give yoga a chance in your life and you will realize what it has to offer. If you are a person who is afflicted by stress and tension, yoga becomes a process of stress release and stress management. For a professional, yoga allows the creativity to be more spontaneous and fluent, and you are able to find satisfaction in life through a deeper involvement and participation in your profession. For a person who is sick, yoga becomes a form of self-therapy, because it allows one to discover the causes of the imbalance which can be physical or psychological in nature. For a person who wishes to find the centre of the self and of being, yoga becomes a process which leads one to that experience. For a person who wishes to realize his or her own religious beliefs, yoga becomes a process to further deepen the understanding of these beliefs.

We have to understand that yoga is a process which helps one live a lifestyle which is in harmony with oneself and with nature. Realizing this today, people are applying

yoga in various dimensions of human society, to better the conditions and the environment. Yoga has gone into industry as part of human resource development. Yoga has gone into sport as part of a program to develop stamina and vitality in athletes. Yoga has gone into schools to develop children's personalities, minds, memories, retention power, attentiveness and general discipline. Yoga has gone into hospitals to help medical practitioners and patients understand the concept of yoga therapy and how it can be applied to alleviate illness. Yoga has gone into space, and many astronauts have practised yoga to alleviate the effects of zero gravity and space sickness on their body. Yoga has also become part of the army's training program in many countries, because yoga helps to manage the psychological problems that soldiers face while on duty. Yoga has come down from the caves and mountains into the research laboratory of scientists and doctors, and from there it is now being applied for the betterment of the human personality. Yoga is a tool through which you can appreciate all the good and beauty that life can provide you with, and be happy, healthy, and live in harmony. Therefore, give yoga a chance in your life.

Questions and Answers

Q. Yoga has been preserved and has existed in the mountains and caves and, in many ways, this safeguarded the knowledge of yoga. Could it be that now that there has been an expansion of yoga into society at large, yoga might be misunderstood or misused?

Swamiji: If you will permit, I will give you a brief history of yoga. There is an ancient tradition dating back about five

thousand years. This tradition is known as the sannyasa tradition, and I belong to it. In the modern context, people define sannyasa as renunciation. In the tradition of sannyasa, there are different schools of renunciates. It is a peculiar tradition, as it is non-religious and non-denominational. The order to which I belong, has as its mandate to preserve all kinds of knowledge and to reveal that knowledge whenever humanity needs it. The major drive, in the propagation of yoga around the world, has been undertaken by sannyasins, whom the West today calls masters or gurus. However, remember that it is a mandate that we have followed for at least five thousand years.

I am deviating from the subject a little, for the problem is that when people see sannyasins teaching yoga, they

the caves and mountains, and you will not hear from us for another five thousand years.

I can understand what you are saying, that the application of yoga can become dangerous, but we also have another understanding and application of human wisdom. Tell me what is not dangerous in the world? A knife, that chops the vegetables in your kitchen, can also be used to kill somebody. Whenever we use an instrument, there is always a component of human wisdom. When you practise yoga, you are developing the quality of wisdom, the quality of awareness, and the quality of understanding along with the practice. It is this quality which acts like the brake of a car when suddenly you find that the car is out of control. If there was no maturity of mind, and if there



think we belong to a religious denomination. This has been one of the reasons why people have considered yoga to be part of eastern belief or religion. To such people we say, "If you want to know what I am, don't look at how I eat, or how I dress, or what I drink, but look at how I think, how I behave and how I act." It is these sannyasins who, if they see that yoga is being misused, will take it back to

was no maturity of consciousness through yoga, yoga would be a useless thing. It is this maturity of mind which guides you to perform the appropriate action. When the mind is not mature, then there is confusion between what is right and wrong, and what is appropriate and what is inappropriate. Therefore, I do not see any danger with yoga today, and I am not apprehensive about it.

Q. In your talk the term 'beauty' was often used. What is beauty? Is there an objective definition of it, or is it a subjective experience for each one of us?

Swamiji: There is no objective definition of beauty. True beauty is experienced when your heart is connected with that experience. The ugliest son for a mother is the dearest and most beautiful one. What is the definition of beautiful for a mother who sees her ugly son as her dear and beautiful one? Beauty is not to be appreciated through the understanding of the mind, but through the opening up of the heart.

Q. In the thirty-five years of your experience with yoga, have there been times of disbelief or doubt and, if so, how did you cope?

Swamiji: What is there to disbelieve in my life? What is there to doubt in my life? I still have to find that out, because I have only one goal, and that goal is to discover my inner Self. If doubts come, they come from within; if understanding comes, it comes from within. Yoga has given me the ability to realize that both doubt and understanding come from within. Doubt can only be one stone on the road. You may fall down, but you can get up again and keep on walking. Doubt, confusion or dissatisfaction are momentary events in life. Those who want to subject themselves to the influences of doubt and disbelief, are free to do so. However, as practitioners of yoga, we come to understand that life is not to get lost in doubts, but that life is a journey towards fulfilment and wholeness. If you stumble and fall, what do you do? You either remain lying on the ground, or you make an attempt to get up and keep on walking.

—Talk and satsang at Ziridis College, Athens, 27
March 2000

Discovering Human Potential through Yoga

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

Greetings to all of you. As you might have guessed already, the subject that we are going to approach today is yoga. I'm sure that you have your own opinion and understanding about this subject, but I wish to approach it from the human perspective.

Until now the common understanding has been that yoga is a series of physical practices leading to health, wellbeing and vitality. There is also an understanding that yoga is a set of meditation practices which help to relieve tension and stress and lead to inner tranquillity. However, the yogic tradition tells us that yoga should be understood in relation to the human personality, and not in relation to human thoughts, ideas and beliefs. Before I discuss the actual subject of yoga, I would like to say something about the history of yoga.

Yoga is not Indian, nor is it part of eastern mysticism. Rather, it is a philosophical way of interacting in life. It is a lifestyle which allows us greater understanding and appreciation in life. It is also a discipline. There have been



ancient philosophies in the world who have expressed the same thoughts as yoga, such as those taught by Socrates and Aristotle. They were philosophies that related to the development and understanding of the human personality and they were not part of any religious belief. The same concept applies to yogic knowledge and understanding. It is an approach to realize life.

How do we understand or realize life through a yogic perspective? Through understanding the various dimensions of the human personality. Modern psychology tells us that there are four major traits of human personality: the dynamic, the intellectual, the emotional, and the psychic. The dynamic personality is a person who is constantly working with his or her body, with the senses and with the environment. The intellectual personality is a person who is reflective, thoughtful, and who seeks understanding and knowledge. The emotional personality is one who is sensitive, considerate and kind, and who feels oneness, compassion, and love for all. The psychic personality is a person who wants to discover the dormant potentials and the hidden dimensions of consciousness in life.



Yoga came to this same conclusion and understanding about five thousand years ago, and devised a set of practices which were applicable to the realization of the total potential of each one of these personalities. For the dynamic personality, yoga identified a series of practices which are known today as hatha yoga. Hatha yoga aims at awakening the vital forces which are in the body and in the mind. Yoga recognizes that there are two main forces which control and govern our life in the physical dimension. One is experienced in the physical body as sensorial vitality, and the other in the mental dimension as the force of mind. The attempt, through the practices of hatha yoga, has been to develop integration, balance and harmony in the physical expressions and mental vitality.

This vitality is recognized by the term prana in Sanskrit, which means vitality, or the life force that is responsible for the senses and mental facilities. It is a yogic thought that most of the stresses, tensions, illnesses and diseases, which are physical and psychological in nature, are caused when there is imbalance in the pranic vitality.

There have been scientists who have looked into the effects of hatha yoga on the human body and mind, and have arrived at the conclusion that with the right application and practice, most of the psychosomatic illnesses and diseases can be effectively managed through yoga. We know that psychosomatic problems mean problems that arise due to stress, and our inability to manage situations which afflict our mind and body. Today

we recognize that stress is the cause of hypertension, sleeplessness, mental imbalances, digestive, respiratory and cardiovascular problems. In other words, we have forgotten today how to relax and how to sleep. It has also been statistically proven that if you collect all the medications from around the world, and put them in one room and divide them in two groups (one, the medications which are used to treat diseases and, two, the medications which are used as tranquillizers), then the volume and quantity of tranquillizers will be more than any other form of medication. The question is do we wish to live a life where we forget our inner harmony and depend on chemicals to rest, relax and sleep? The practices of hatha yoga play a very important role. They recreate the balance of energy, stamina and health in the body. In the world today there are many hatha yoga teachers who teach the postures, breathing techniques and other physical-oriented techniques, to find a psycho-physiological balance.

The second dimension of the personality is the intellectual dimension. As you know, our intellect plays a lot of games with us. Sometimes, due to our intellect, we are not able to differentiate between the just and the unjust, between right and wrong. We understand the intellect as a tool to gain more knowledge. However, although we gain knowledge, our intellect, since it is not trained, cannot apply that knowledge to enrich our life. Mental conflicts, confusion and stresses are caused when our intellect is clouded and is unable to know good from bad, just from unjust, and harmony from disharmony. In order to manage the intellectual dimensions of the human personality, yoga came up with the system of jnana yoga. Many people who do not know the right system of jnana yoga, say that it is a process of asking the question, "Who am I?" Once, during my travels in America, I came across

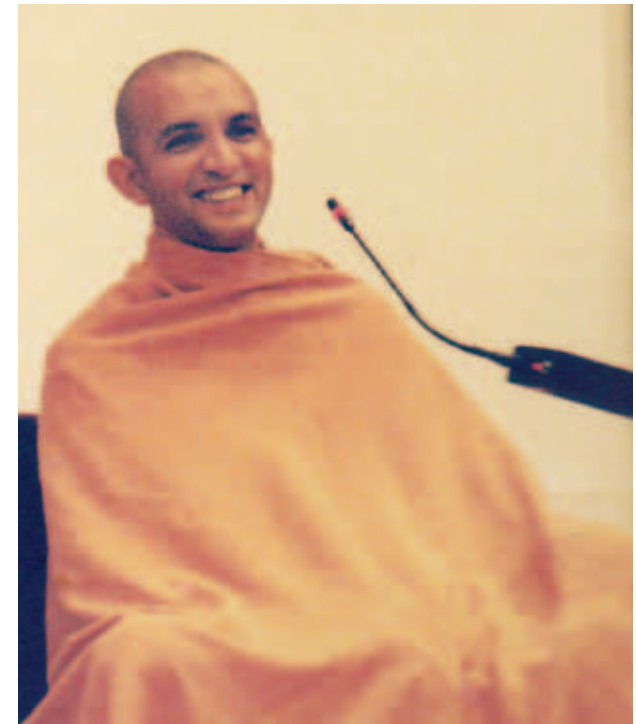
a person who wished to be recognized as a great jnana yogi. I asked him, "How do you practise jnana yoga?" I remained very serious and sincere as he replied, "Every morning, when I sit at my breakfast table, I ask myself the question 'Who am I?' This is the extent of my jnana yoga practice."

However, questions such as: "Who am I and what is my role in life?" are not jnana yoga. Asking these questions is intellectual musing. Jnana yoga is a process of internalization and of awareness, where reflection, understanding, and knowing the intricate movements of the personality, become the purpose and the aim. I would even go so far as to say that any form of meditation, which we do in order to deepen our knowledge of the personality, is jnana yoga. Jnana yoga is a series of meditative practices which allow us to discover, know and realize how our thoughts influence our behaviour and actions, how our emotions influence our behaviour and actions, and how our deep rooted psychological impressions influence our behaviour and actions. Therefore, those who have read books on jnana yoga may find it strange to hear this from me, for you have read that jnana yoga is the yoga of self-questioning. That is not correct. It is a process of developing and increasing awareness. The series of meditative techniques are progressive and sequential, and allow us a deeper and greater understanding of the nature and behaviour of our own personalities, and how the intellect interacts in our life to either beautify or destroy it.

The third dimension of the human personality is the emotional dimension. We have not yet learned how to express our emotions. Rather, we have been taught not to express our emotions, and always keep a straight face. As you are aware, the trend in the world has been to awaken or stimulate other faculties, but not those of the

emotions, and we care more for the IQ, the intellectual quotient, rather than the EQ, the emotional quotient. In order to appreciate life, in order to understand our role in society, and in order to understand what our obligations, duties and responsibilities for the betterment of our own life are, there has to be a balance between the intellect and the emotions. In the last five years, people have started to talk about developing positive emotions. Psychology will have to work hard for another two or three decades to develop an understanding of emotional human behaviour. However, yoga has been approaching this subject for a long time by adopting the principles and practices of bhakti yoga.

Bhakti, in general terms, is translated by scholars as devotion, but from the yogic perspective bhakti is translated as emotion. It is a channelling of emotions in the right direction to make them more positive. Emotion is a force; it is energy and it is power. As an example, a crystal ball is clear and has no colour of its own. If you place the ball on top of a red cloth it will reflect red. If you place it on a black cloth the black colour will be reflected. If you place the ball on all the different colours, all the colours will be reflected in it. However, the nature of the crystal ball is not to show any colour, but to be transparent and clear. Yoga sees emotion like the crystal ball. When our emotion attaches itself to money, greed is reflected in it. When our emotion comes in contact with our children, affection is reflected in it. When our emotion comes into contact with our adversaries, jealousy and competitiveness are reflected in it. When our emotion comes into contact with fear or insecurity, frustration and anger are reflected in it. When that emotion is associated with an object of desire, passion is associated with it. It is in this way that emotion colours our perceptions and expressions in life. Management of our emotions occurs



through the practice of bhakti yoga. Eventually, we reach a state where we experience unity and comprehension of the situations and conditions which surround us.

However, we need to work more in order to understand the expression of our emotions. We lack the basic education on how to express our emotions. We are told not to cry because crying is bad, and we are told to be self-assertive as it will lead to success. Expressing an emotion becomes a sign of weakness, but it is not so. Expressing an emotion, with understanding associated with it, becomes a force which can develop a deeper comprehension and appreciation about it. This can lead to transcendence and not bondage. What do we look for in the world? Love. We look for compassion and understanding. Where does love

come from? Where does compassion come from? Where does kindness come from? They all come from emotions, not logic or intellect.

As we lack a basic understanding of the emotional process, we search for happiness outside of ourselves. We search for situations in which we can experience tranquillity, outside of ourselves. However, the source of completeness, wholeness, happiness, joy and peace is inside and not outside of ourselves. When we hear such words, we say, "Oh, what a beautiful philosophy and what a beautiful thought!" But we are not able to implement these ideas in our life and realize these emotions. Bhakti yoga, through a series of practices such as mantra, introspection and reflection, allows us to understand the emotional personality and the emotional structure in a clearer way.

The fourth dimension of the human personality is the psychic dimension. What is the meaning of the word 'psychic'? It is something coming from the depths of our consciousness which has no connection or association with intellect and logic. In fact, logic is a very small expression of our nature. The greater part of our expression is psychic. In order to realize the psychic dimension of the human personality, we have to go deep into the realms of consciousness.

We know, according to science, that only one-tenth of our brain is active. The rest of the brain is inactive. What would be the state of a human being if the total potential of the physical brain was developed and expressed? If, with one-tenth of our brain active, we are able to achieve so much, the possibilities are staggering if the entire brain was active. It is the same with the human mind. Psychology has, in order to understand the mental process, compartmentalized the mind as conscious, subconscious, and unconscious. However, the yogic tradition has gone

a step further. It says that beyond the conscious, beyond the subconscious, beyond the unconscious, there is the super-mind, which represents the consciousness becoming aware of itself. This is a peculiar concept, which is difficult to understand. How can consciousness become aware of itself?

We can compare the entire field of consciousness with the ocean. On the surface of the ocean there is vision due to sunlight but, as you dive deeper, there is a diminishing of sunlight. The experience is not that of light, but of diminishing light. When you reach the bottom of the ocean there is absolute blackness. Now, just imagine that the entire ocean is illuminated with light. How would we perceive the ocean? Awareness is the sun, and the ocean is the consciousness. As we go deeper into our own



consciousness, awareness decreases, and the decreasing states of awareness are recognized as the subconscious and the unconscious. However, if the same intensity of awareness was maintained, even in the deepest levels of the unconscious, then imagine the luminosity that would be experienced within reflecting the total consciousness.

The psychic dimension of yoga is approached and experienced with the practices of raja yoga, kriya yoga and kundalini yoga. The total luminosity of consciousness, in relation to raja yoga, is known as samadhi. The total luminosity of consciousness, in relation to kriya yoga, is known as the opening up of the dormant energy centres of the chakras. The total luminosity of consciousness, from the viewpoint of kundalini yoga, is the ascent of the primal energy known as kundalini.

The underlying principles, of all practices of yoga, are self-awareness and discipline. Self-awareness plus discipline equals yoga. We only have to understand these two concepts in order to understand the aim and the goal that yoga tries to attain. Through awareness we are able to realize our own true nature; through discipline we are able to control the dissipations of human nature.

We live in the dimension of the senses and the body. Our first experience of life is the body. The second experience is of our mind in the form of thoughts, aspirations, ambitions, and desires. The third experience, which takes a long time to arise, is the understanding of the source of life: the spirit. As the body is our first experience, it becomes the tool of our journey. Therefore yoga begins with the practice of physical postures, and when the body becomes still and quiet, the mind also becomes still and quiet.

In science there is an experiment of creating standing waves, and the simplest form of creating standing waves is to tie one end of a hundred-feet length of rope to a door

handle and stretch that rope. Hold the other end of the rope and move your hand up and down. As you move your hand you will see the rope moving up and down. Although you are moving only one end of the rope, the entire rope is being moved. Similarly, when you practise the physical postures, you are not only working with your body, but you are also working with your mind, emotions and spirit. The balance, wellbeing, health and vitality, which you generate and experience in the body, through the performance of the physical postures, affect the mental dimension, the psychic dimension and the spiritual dimension of the practitioner. In this way, even the most basic of the physical practices can help us achieve our balance and harmony internally. This process is further intensified when we combine relaxation and meditation practices with the physical postures. In this process,

harmony and integration of the body, mind and spirit are experienced, and yoga comes a full circle, which means union. Therefore, I humbly request all of you to give yoga a chance in your life.

Questions and Answers

Q. Is there a difference between emotions and feeling, and what is the difference if there is one?

Swamiji: Emotion is the original substance; it is the clay. From that clay you can make different figures, different pots and pans, and they are the expressions of that clay. In the same way, feelings are the expressions of emotions.



Q. Could you tell us what the meaning of life is?

Learn to love, learn to laugh, learn to live.

Q. How are we going to learn how to laugh and how to love?

Swamiji: Tell me, did you learn anywhere how to be angry and how to be jealous? Nobody has taught us how to express our anger, nobody has taught us how to express our frustration, so why do we need to learn how to love? There should be a spontaneous expression of understanding and adaptation to a situation. You can truly love if you can put yourself into the shoes of the other person. But make sure that you can shape your feet to fit the shoes of the other!

Q. Why does human nature have a natural inclination towards negative emotions?

Swamiji: Due to a basic lack of discipline and lack of understanding of our actions. This is one of the major reasons why we are pulled towards destruction and not towards creativity. Creativity and peace imply that you understand yourself and understand other people. When we are unable to understand ourselves, and when we are unable to direct our own expressions, then that leads to restricting expressions of human nature. Therefore, we return again to the basic understanding of yoga, which is awareness.

Q. How can I overcome the pain of having lost a child?

Swamiji: I cannot preach to a mother on this subject, for whatever I say will be construed as philosophical. The sensitivity of the mother goes beyond any logic and philosophy. The pain that you feel is personal, and there is no change in that. At the same time, you should allow this pain to be released, realizing the realities and the

practicalities of life. Do not let loss be the predominant factor in your life, but love which you can still express, no matter where you are or where the child is. The pain of loss can definitely be converted into love, and into thankfulness for the coming into life of the child, and for having been given the opportunity to love that life. I hope you will understand my sentiments.

Q. Swamiji, can you tell us something about detachment?

Swamiji: What is there to talk about? You attach, you detach; you plug, you unplug. I don't know why people get so worried about attachment and detachment when in reality there is nothing to worry about. We feel threatened by the idea of detachment, as it threatens our self-security. However, there is a natural law of absorption and elimination. The food that we eat is absorbed and then eliminated. The same thing happens on the mental plane too. Experiences that we absorb are also eliminated, after we gain the right understanding from them. If we do not release experiences, from which we have gained understanding and a deeper perception of life, then we go through a state of mental constipation. In order to release physical constipation we resort to purgatives, and in order to release mental constipation we also have to resort to purgatives. The mental purgative is meditation. When you meditate you become aware of the deep attachments which cause you pain, suffering, anxiety and insecurity. This purgative is logically identified as detachment.

Yoga, however, does not believe in detachment. Yoga believes in non-attachment. If I give you a television to safeguard for me until I return next, what will you do with it? It will be kept in your trust, and no matter what you do, you will always take care of it. You may use it for ten years, but in the back of your mind you will always know that it does not belong to you. It is entrusted to you. It is



the same with your life, your body, your mind, and the objects that surround you. They are entrusted to you to experience joy, happiness and beauty in life. However, we think, "This is mine. I possess it. I paid for it." When the idea of 'mine' comes into your mind, there is possession,

and that possession is the cause of attachment. When we believe that this life has been entrusted to us, and that this body has been given to us for a purpose and we have to take care of it, that state is known as non-attachment. In non-attachment there is use and non-abuse. With possession there is misuse and abuse. Therefore, non-attachment is a state of mental perception. It is a state of mind when clarity dominates and not confusion.

Q. Do you believe that we have come into this life with a specific aim to fulfil? If we don't fulfil this aim, are we then given other chances in other lives to fulfil it?

Swamiji: I frankly don't know. Sometimes I wonder whether we come into this life to raise a family, to earn money, to gain fame, and to go without leaving any imprint on the sands of time. However, I feel this is a materialistic way of thinking. There is also a human way of thinking. I am not saying 'a spiritual way'; I am saying 'a human way'. From the perspective of human thought, and not materialistic or spiritual thought, life has a purpose. That purpose is to help others in their progress and growth through the process of appreciation of the beauty and the auspiciousness that exists around us. Nobody has provided an absolute answer to the purpose of life, and whether we come back, or we go to some other place. However, each tradition and each religion has spoken about the possibility of entering a higher dimension of life. In this higher dimension of life you are not struggling to find your happiness; rather, you come in tune and contact with the forces that govern life. The realization of the forces that govern life and creation in yoga is called the super-consciousness which, in religion, is called God. This is the aim of life.

*—Talk and satsang at Goethe Institute,
Athens, 28 March 2000*

Sannyasa and the Beauty of Life

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

Swami Niranjan was welcomed to Greece and to the Sannyasa Festival by Swami Sivamurti, Acharya of Satyanandashram Hellas. As part of the festivities, a play was performed by Greek sannyasins, based on incidents from the life of Diogenes (an ancient Greek sannyasin and philosopher). Diogenes walked the streets of Athens, even during the day, with a lantern that was always alight. He stated that when he found an honest individual, he would put out his lantern. Diogenes never found such a person in his lifetime but, today, if he met Swami Niranjan, Diogenes would be able to extinguish the lantern.

Diogenes died a very sad man. He must have burned a lot of oil and that would have been a major expenditure for him. Diogenes would have found not me, but the masters of the tradition, and more specifically, Swami Sivananda. He would have then understood the concept of simplicity, purity and honesty. These qualities were reflected in the personality of Swami Sivananda. The message or the teaching that was imparted by Swami Sivananda to his disciples, was that you do not have to search for the light outside, but that the light will shine forth from within, once you are able to purify yourself. Those who have adhered to this expression and wisdom of Swami Sivananda, today find that they have not made any attempt to become luminous, but that the light is shining from their hearts. This has also been the vision of ancient India.



There is a saying from ancient India, *Atma dipo bhava*, which means “Become self-effulgent.” The process of becoming self-effulgent has been the attempt and the sadhana of thinkers in the past. However, in order to become self-effulgent, there has to be an adjustment and modification in your life. If you work in a coal mine wearing white clothes, then it becomes very difficult to maintain the cleanliness of the clothes. The blackness of the coal is ultimately going to affect the whiteness of the clothes. That has happened to each and every individual who has come to work and live in this dimension. The purity and effulgence of the Self have been diminished with the influence of the world of the senses and sensuality. As people become more aware of the need to find harmony and integration in their lives, there is an attempt to become pure in thought, in word and in deed.

This attempt, to become pure in thought, word and deed, is the aim and the purpose of the sannyasa system.

This Sannyasa Festival, which we are celebrating for the first time outside India, represents an attempt to understand the concept of developing the pure inner nature, full of wisdom, full of understanding, full of compassion and full of love. There have been many yoga events, seminars and conferences in the past, but never a seminar which dealt only and specifically with sannyasa. It is appropriate that we are thinking about this process of attaining inner purity in Greece, a civilization which gave great thinkers and philosophers to the world, and that has helped shape the mentality of people and made them aware of another dimension in life. There has been a lot of influence of Indian thought on ancient Greek thought, and there also has been a lot of influence of ancient

Greek thought on Indian thought. Although we are geographically and culturally poles apart, the integration between the two cultures has taken place in the form of a philosophical understanding and knowledge. Even when Alexander the Great was leaving for India, before going he met his master and asked him what he could bring him from India, and his master said, "Bring me a wise man from India." The cross-cultural exchange, which took place between ancient Greece and ancient India, was of knowledge. Therefore, it is appropriate that in reviving this ancient connection, today we are celebrating this event, this idea, this concept, and this belief of sannyasa in Greece.

What is sannyasa? This is the first question which we need to address. Is it asceticism? Is it renouncing the world and becoming a monk? Is it following a specific belief system, or is it part of a religion? It is not asceticism, it is not renunciation, it is not adherence to a specific belief, and it is not part of any religion. Rather, it is a tradition. It is a tradition which has been concerned with knowledge and wisdom for the development of the individual as a single unit, for the development of society as a communal unit, and for the development of understanding of deeper relationships, which link us, the individual, with the universal reality. It has been those people, belonging to the tradition, who have maintained the wisdom of the past for use in the environment of the present.

In the sannyasa tradition we find many people who have written a lot on social and spiritual life. These people were known as sages or seers. A sage or seer is one who is able to see the needs of society, one who is able to perceive the knowledge which will be utilized for the development of society. It was a sannyasin who wrote the book, Kama Sutra, which I am sure many of you must have read. The name of the sannyasin was Vatsayana. It

was a sannyasin who wrote the first treatise on atomic theories and principles and his name was Sage Kanad. It was a sannyasin who wrote the first book in the world describing an economic balance that can exist between nations, cultures and societies. It was a sannyasin who gave us the philosophy of tantra, who gave us the philosophy of Vedanta, and who gave us the philosophy of Samkhya, for understanding of the human personality. It was a sannyasin who wrote a treatise on health and medicine. It was a sannyasin who wrote a book describing the manufacturing and use of various armaments to defend countries against aggression. I am telling you all this to indicate one thing: sannyasins have considered all the dimensions of individual and social life, and they have taken steps to preserve and maintain the sanctity and purity of human life, in both material and spiritual terms. Paramahamsaji has said many times that as sannyasins we are concerned with the preservation of vidya, knowledge.

Sannyasa is not a path of asceticism. It is not a process of renouncing the world, it is not a philosophical sect or a cult, but it is the expression of an understanding for the sustenance and development of human society. Today we have limited the role of sannyasa to spiritual pursuits and philosophical interpretations of life, but that is only one aspect of the sannyasa tradition. Sannyasins themselves have not propagated any form of sectarian belief or religion. Even today we find that sannyasins who are true to their tradition, remain aloof from religions and conditioned beliefs. The truthfulness of sannyasa is lost on many people, as they are not able to understand what it is, and they take it as the means to be recognized in society as a master, guru, or preacher.

Sannyasa does not advocate renunciation. Rather, it advocates letting go of things that are unnecessary in your life. What do we renounce anyway? What is renunciation?



Is renunciation leaving the family, is renunciation leaving society, is renunciation leaving the home, is renunciation leaving the pleasures and comforts of life, or is it something else? Renunciation is not a vow of poverty, and renunciation is not rejection of the social environment and conditions. Paramahamsaji has said many times that it is easy to renounce family, society, friends, comforts and luxuries, but it is very difficult to renounce the agitations, desires and ambitions of our nature. He has also said that

if at all there is to be perfect renunciation in life, it has to be of the desires, ambitions, and of the idolization of people.

Sannyasa is also different from the relationship which exists between the guru and disciple. The relationship between the guru and disciple is another affair. The disciple puts the guru on a high pedestal and idolizes him. But sannyasa does not permit that at all. Therefore, do not confuse the concept of the guru-disciple relationship with the ideas of sannyasa. They are two different systems and paths altogether. Sannyasa is a tradition. The word sannyasa consists of two parts: sam which means total, and nyasa which means to put in trust. Paramahamsaji has explained this by saying that when you have money, which you wish to use for some charitable purpose, you put it in a trust. The rules of the trust are such that that the money cannot be touched for personal use or pleasure, but it is always to be used for the benefit of others. The same applies to sannyasa as well. You place in trust your abilities, your strengths and your qualities to help other people. One's strengths, qualities and abilities are the wealth which everyone has. It is this wealth which is placed in trust for the universal consciousness. When we begin to consider that nothing is mine, rather that everything is to beautify and enrich life, that is the beginning of sannyasa. Sannyasa begins with an understanding or a sensitivity towards the auspiciousness and the beauty of life. You should think about this thoroughly and consider whether it is applicable to your situation and circumstances of life.

The second awareness is of the tradition. Sannyasa is not only a concept; it is a tradition which involves modifications and moderations in life. These modifications and moderations give a deeper



identification with our own selves. It is not an easy process. If it was simple, everybody in the world would be able to follow it. It is in this process that you become aware of the faith and trust that is not towards a person, but towards a mission and a vision. The person becomes a medium to express the aims of the mission and the vision. This is the actual concept of sannyasa.

I mentioned that it is a tradition which goes back many thousands of years. The earliest reference we have of sannyasins living and working goes back about ten thousand years. In the time of the empire created by Rama, sannyasins were the guides, gurus and moral authorities of the empire. However, they were not living the luxuries of the court; they were living a simple and pure life. They had their own system and their own lifestyle, which was different to the life of the court. They had their ashrams, known as gurukuls, or the family of the guru, where adults and children of the society were educated in skills pertaining to the material and spiritual life. They were the first people who did experiments not only with academic education, but also with vocational education, alongside the academics. They were able to educate society with academic understanding and with vocational skills. Those gurukuls, in today's language, would be colleges, universities and schools. They also followed a tradition which helped people to tune in with the natural and cosmic forces. They were the law makers of the past, who cared for nature, who cared for human society, and who cared for social justice, social law and social order. There are many scriptures and other books which, even today, are used to understand the processes, the situations and the conditions of past cultures and civilizations.

When they were caring for their immediate environment and the preservation of nature, sannyasins

adopted the means which were later described as rituals. However, in Sanskrit, we do not call such activities rituals. We call them yajnas or havans, and they help to enrich the environment. Sannyasins understood that the environment was not only made up of the elements, such as air, space, water, fire and earth, but also of the underlying principle of energy. When that energy is nourished and sustained, then it also nourishes human life. They also discovered that a person is not only an expression of the senses, but within the expression of the senses there is the expression of spirit. The component which we see predominantly is the reflective nature of sannyasa. Through reflection we are able to understand the spiritual link that exists between all forms of creation and oneself. It is this system of life, this system of understanding, and this system of the expression of human qualities that we shall discuss during this festival.

In sannyasa, there is also an external discipline. External discipline leads to an understanding of an inner discipline. It is an external awareness which leads to realization of the inner awareness. The external discipline is known and recognized as sadhana: the personal effort to create an environment conducive to change. Through sadhana, by creating an atmosphere of transformation, many have been successful in realizing the unity of nature, personality, and universal consciousness. Sannyasins never believed in one form of God; they did not have a concept of God. Rather, they believed in the imperishable reality; the reality which does not change, which does not alter. They recognized that life is perishable, changeable and transformable. However, beyond this perishable and changeable aspect, there is also the imperishable and



unchangeable dimension of experience. The verbal expression which they gave to this imperishable dimension was Om, Pranava. Om became the symbol of the sannyasa tradition and even today, as we progress along the path of sannyasa, the master gives instruction to sannyasins to focus only on Om, and not on any image, form or expression. Om is the representation of the omniscience, omnipotence and omnipresence of the universal consciousness. If at all there was any belief that sannyasins adhered to, it was the belief of the imperishable reality expressed in the form of Om.

It was only as cultures became isolated from each other that we started to think of sannyasa as part of eastern mysticism. As the cultures drifted apart, they created their own systems of belief and understanding of the life processes. As the cultures drifted apart from each other, they held on to one concept and idea, and believed that concept and idea to be final. Today, each culture and each belief is a blind belief and a blind culture, and we are not able to see the whole and complete picture. You know the story of the three blind men who go to see the elephant. One holds the tail and says, "I know the elephant to be like a rope." Another, who holds a leg, says, "I know the elephant to be like a pillar." The third, who holds the trunk, says, "I know the elephant to be like a python." In this way, each one gives a different interpretation of what the elephant is, but none of these interpretations reflect the true image of the elephant. This is the behaviour of our civilization and our culture today.

Sometimes there is great conflict and confusion as we are not able to understand or comprehend what is the reality. We are caught in our own head

trips, without having the ability to come out of them with a developed, better or harmonious perception. Therefore, the modern masters, who saw the state of society said, "Sannyasa should be again brought to light, so that it can provide a person with tools to greater appreciate the truth in life." It was the tradition of Swami Sivananda that maintained the purity of the sannyasa tradition. Not all the people who belonged to the Sivananda tradition understood the concept of sannyasa, but there were a few who were able to imbibe the real nature of sannyasa. Swami Sivananda was the first master, in this present age, to start initiating people and spiritual aspirants in the path of sannyasa. He was criticized for doing so by the authorities of the tradition. Nevertheless he continued, for he felt and realized that sannyasa allows one to come in contact with the inner nature. This understanding of sannyasa was further developed by his disciple, and our master, Swami Satyananda, for which he was also criticized a lot. However, he was not concerned about criticism, because he knew that spiritual realization is the birthright of every individual. A new understanding had to develop of sannyasa, therefore certain classifications were made in the tradition.

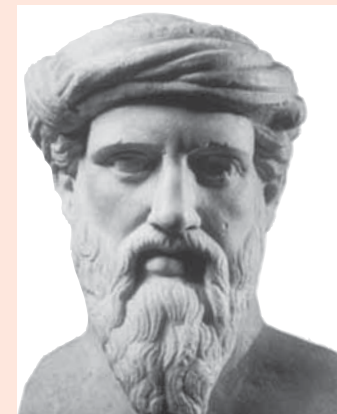
To live the life of sannyasa is very difficult, and not possible or practical for the majority of people. It is like truth; it is not possible to always speak the truth. Somebody once asked Mullah Nassiruddin, "Have you ever spoken the truth in your life?" He answered, "Truth is something that I have never spoken, and nor will I speak or attempt to speak it." This does not imply that he was a liar, but that the expression of truth is an improbable and very difficult expression in a situation which does not allow us to be truthful with ourselves. Truth is not something that you can speak through your mouth and with your tongue; it is something which you experience in the depth of your heart. Telling the bare facts is not the truth. Similarly, sannyasa is also a difficult process, as it is something which has to be experienced internally, and not lived in a rigid discipline externally. It was for this reason that I initially said that sannyasa is not asceticism; it is not renunciation and it is not rejection of the environment. This will be the subject that we will discuss during this festival, in relation to our life, and how we can experience inner balance and beauty.

It has been a pleasure coming here to Greece. Swami Sivamurti mentioned that it has been a long wait, but I wish to assure you that it has not been a long wait only for you, but for me as well. As they say, good things should come only in certain times of our life. If you are surrounded by good things all the time, there is no appreciation; you take it for granted. When you know that good things are going to come in a little dose, then there is always a greater expectation, a greater feeling, a greater association, a greater appreciation and a greater love. It gives me immense joy and happiness to be here with all of you today.

—Discourse at Satyanandashram Hellas,
29 March 2000

In sannyasa, there is also an external discipline. External discipline leads to an understanding of an inner discipline. It is an external awareness which leads to realisation of the inner awareness.

Swami Niranjan on the Common Roots of India and Greece



Pythagoras of Samos,
c. 570 - c. 495 BC

Plato and the Upanishads

There is an interesting comparison between the philosophy of Plato and the philosophy conveyed in the Upanishads. In Plato's lifetime, the civilian mentality was not ready to accept spiritual experiences, realities or concepts. Therefore, Plato's thoughts are cryptic and contain hidden meanings. However, the ideas conveyed in his teachings are the eternal truth.

Guru-disciple relationship

There are parallels between the guru-disciple relationship that existed in ancient Greece and in the vedic tradition. The guru-disciple relationship is an ancient tradition.

Pythagoras and tantra

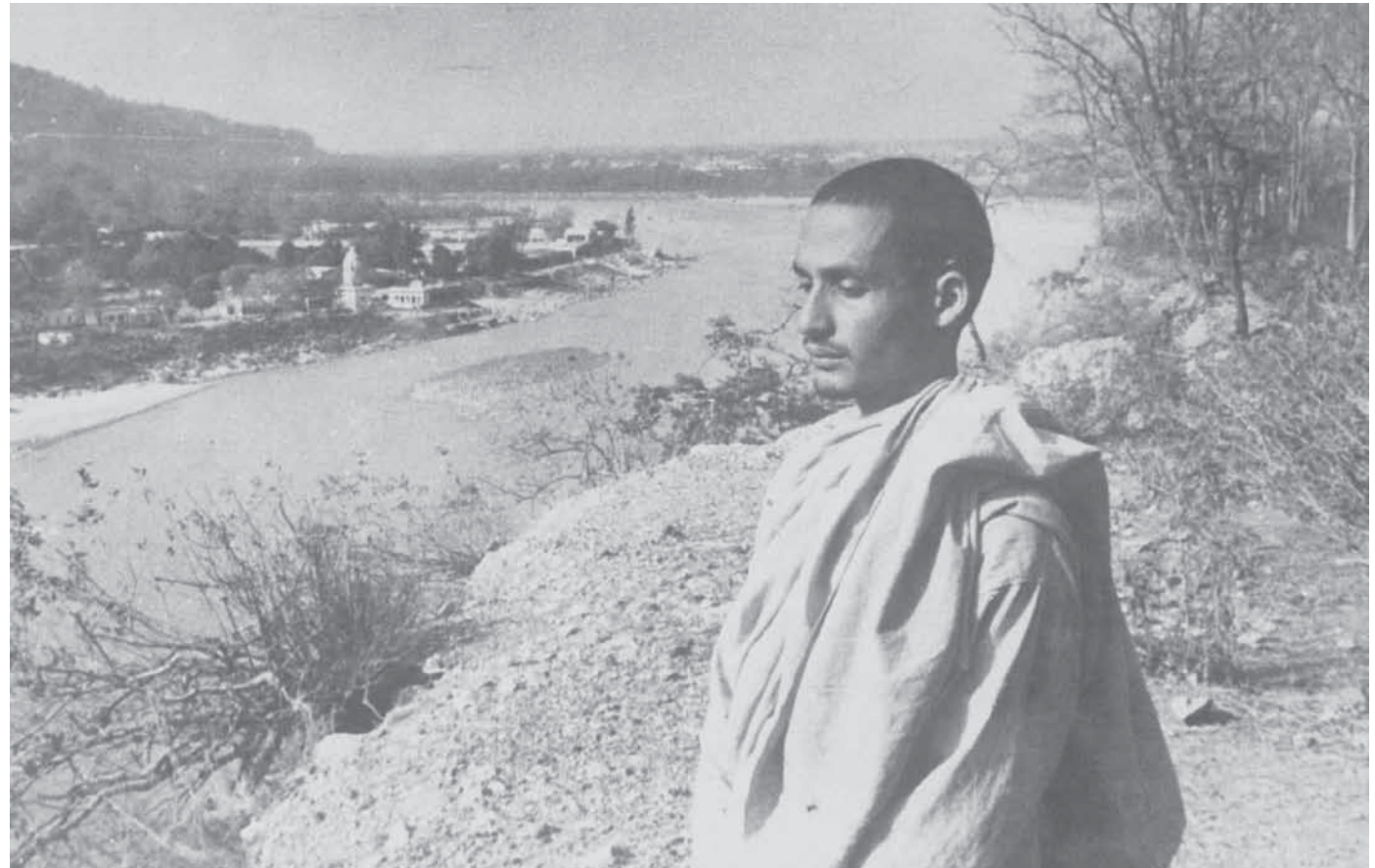
The teachings of Pythagoras have much in common with tantra. Myths, mysteries and initiations are the three components of tantric meditation and the tantric way of life.

The Ideal of Sannyasa

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

This morning we discussed the meaning and history of sannyasa. Now, I would like to tell you about the inspiration and ideal of sannyasa. I will not speak from the theological or the philosophical viewpoint, but give you an example of the sannyasa ideal, as it was perceived and experienced in the life of our guru, Sri Swami Satyananda. I think this should amply define and indicate the ideal of sannyasa and how we are able to perceive life as sannyasins.

When Swami Sivananda gave Paramahamsaji sannyasa initiation, then, as is the habit of every disciple, he wrote a poem. The poetic expression of an inner feeling is the most appropriate one, and poetic expressions take a different dimension when they come from the heart of an enlightened being. The poem that was written by Paramahamsaji is called On Sankalpa (on resolution). Whenever I remind myself of it, or read the poem, it gives me great inspiration, motivation, faith, courage, and strength. Maybe the fourth generation will tell you about other poems, but I am going to read the poem of Paramahamsaji, and let you feel the sentiment that is coming through it.



On Sankalpa

The first part is known as the source:

*I am an invisible child of a thousand faces of love,
That floats over the swirling sea of life,
The invisible child is the spirit, and the thousand faces
of love are the various expressions of the spirit, in the
manifest and the unmanifest dimension, containing and
expressing only love.*

*Surrounded by the meadows of the winged shepherds,
Where stillness of divine love and beauty
Rain in the spring and bloom in the midnight
Summer's warmth of softness.
Often I pass to the place
Where there is no separation of the sun and moon,
But where eternal light spreads a carpet
Of sparkling reflections of itself
Within the heart and eyes of all,*

Even those who are blind to see.
 Where sweetness has no taste,
 For it is the essence of all being,
 And where teardrops water flowers of happiness
 And pass into brooklets of experience
 And then to the open sea.
 Life often cuts at my body and mind
 And though blood may be seen passing,
 And a cry might be heard,
 Do not be deceived that sorrow could dwell within my
 being
 Or suffering within my soul.
 There shall never be a storm
 That can wash the path from my feet,
 The direction from my heart,
 The light from my eyes,
 Or the purpose from this life.
 I know that I am untouchable to the forces
 As long as I have a direction, an aim, a goal:
 To serve, to love, and to give.
 Strength lies in the magnification of the secret qualities
 Of my own personality, my own character
 And though I am only a messenger,
 I am me.

Now the part of aspirations:

Let me decorate many hearts
 And paint a thousand faces with colours of inspiration
 And soft silent sounds of value.
 Let me be like a child,
 Run barefoot through the forest
 Of laughing and crying people,
 Giving flowers of imagination and wonder,

That God gives free.
 Do I have time to ask whom I shall love,
 From whom shall I ask for something more
 Than all I have been given,
 Or what is meant by the signs that pass before my
 windows.
 I learned to read half a century ago
 but found it useful only for speaking
 for those who continue to live by books.
 I shall not pretend to understand nor shall I try to reason
 For the satisfaction of rationalization.
 Yesterday I sat in the park
 And shared an orange and an afternoon
 With the divines and myself.
 And who am I?
 Don't be deceived by my words, my manner, my way
 Or by my friendliness or by the image of that of a man.
 I sleep, eat, talk and play with you and others,
 But remember that the gift of inspiration, of perfection
 Is a priceless island of treasure,
 Which that whom we call God
 Placed at the end of rainbows.
 If I believe I have strength
 To hold back seas, to move mountains,
 And the determination to live and love life,
 It is because I have felt and seen an image of inspiration
 Visible to my unseeing eyes.
 Yes, I cried yesterday when I read sorrow
 In the heart of my love,
 For I am more than human,
 And I laughed from my belly
 When I saw two camels playing in a sea of yellow.
 I am not insensitive, nor have I dulled my senses,
 But never shall I become submerged or lost

In the experience of these images,
 Of these feelings, of these emotions.
 Don't think that as a child
 My heart cannot turn as hard as stone,
 When the arrow of opposition to what I believe in
 Tries to pierce my centre of principle and character.
 I have a cause, a meaning, a worth for individuality,
 All as a means for living in this life,
 For striding steps forward, for achieving a mission.
 Shall I fall on bended knees,
 And wait for someone to bless me
 With happiness and a life of golden dreams?
 No, I shall run into the desert of life with my arms open,
 Sometimes falling, sometimes stumbling,
 But always picking myself up, a thousand times if
 necessary,
 Sometimes happy.
 Often life will burn me,
 Often life shall caress me tenderly
 And many of my days shall be haunted
 With complications and obstacles,
 And there will be moments so beautiful
 That my soul shall weep in ecstasy.
 I shall be a witness
 But never shall I run
 Or turn away from life, from me.
 Never shall I forsake myself
 Or the timeless lessons I have taught myself,
 Nor shall I let the value
 Of divine inspiration and being be lost,
 My rainbow-covered bubble shall carry me
 Further than beyond the horizon's settings,
 Forever to serve, to love, and to live
 As a sannyasin.

This was the sankalpa, as it manifested spontaneously, in the life of our guru, Swami Satyananda, and the hallmark of his life of sannyasa has been 'to serve, love and purify'. The sannyasa tradition does not say that one has to isolate oneself from the world; rather, it says to become an integrated part of the world. This is where sannyasa differs from the other concepts or traditions of asceticism and renunciation. It was this same concept which propelled Buddha to come out in the open to serve the public after he had achieved enlightenment; it was the same belief that prompted Mahavira to come out and serve humanity after attaining nirvana; and it was the same inspiration that forced Jesus to come out and serve the suffering humanity after having attained Christ consciousness. Through these examples, we can see that isolation from the world, and getting involved and lost in our own realization, has never been the aim of a tradition which has advocated service. This is the opposite understanding of how we usually understand the process of realization. In that concept of realization there is a shunning, a rejection, and a suppression of the natural expressions, beauty and experiences of life. In sannyasa there is no rejection or shunning, but rather an understanding that each object and each event can become a tool to discover the source of contentment and truth within. However, before we can express this, not in the form of indulgence, but in the form of a direction in our life, we have to undergo training, and the aim of training is to train the untrained mind.

A little while ago, Swami Prakashananda was singing a song, 'Put your hands in the hands of the man who walks on waters.' Water represents or symbolizes life and the unconscious. We do not walk in life, we sink in life. We sink in life as we are unable to confront the situations, problems and difficulties, and we subject ourselves to

influences. When we subject ourselves to such restrictive experiences, then how can we flow? We sink because these restrictions are like chains, holding rocks which pull us down into the depths. This has been the reason why people have always sought freedom from suffering and pain. Suffering and pain sink us in life, and we cannot experience the joys of life. However, through the training, education, knowledge and wisdom that we give ourselves, we learn not to sink, but to walk on the waters of life.

The second line was, 'Put your hands in the hands of the man who stills the seas.' When we are able to know the causes of pain and suffering, then all our passions, vrittis, mental, destructive and dissipated forces become still. Remember: Yoga chitta vritti nirodhah – "Cessation or stilling the vrittis of the mind is yoga." When the vrittis are stilled, there are no obsessive or passionate expressions, but expressions which contain and convey wisdom. The third line of the song was, 'Take a look at yourself, and you can look at others differently.' Remember the sentence of yoga: Tada drastuh swarupe avasthanam – "Then you will become established in your real nature." When we are able to look at ourselves as we are, without the covering of any mask, then we also begin to see others as they are, without any wrappings or masks.

It is this training, which is known as sadhana. The training, through which we can still the agitations of mind and harmonize the expressions of life, is sadhana. Yoga does not say that you have to become light yourself. If you want to spread light, it is not necessary that you become the light yourself. You can become a mirror that reflects light. Those who become light are the Gurus, and those who become the mirrors are the swamis. The concept of a swami is one who is a master of the self. Swami is not an identity, nor a degree, nor a piece of paper qualifying you as a swami. It is the culmination of a process and of an effort



in sadhana, which allows you to become pure and free. The ideal of sannyasa is service, love, and purity. This is how we need to understand the future definition of sannyasa.

—Discourse at Satyanandashram Hellas,
29 March 2000

The First Stroke on the Canvas of Life

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

So far we have discussed the story of sannyasa, its history and ideals that keep our inspiration alive. However, the greatest task in sannyasa is to become detached or attain vairagya.

There is a very beautiful passage in the Bhagavad Gita, the teaching of Sri Krishna to Arjuna. Sri Krishna is telling Arjuna that it is the association of the mind with different objects that creates attachment. Attachment creates desire, and when desire is not fulfilled, it creates anger and aggression. Aggressiveness and anger give birth to confusion of intellect, and when the intellect is confused, the memory and the knowledge of right or wrong is lost. When the understanding of right and wrong is lost, then the inner personality is totally dissipated and disturbed, and this imbalance in the inner personality leads to death in life. This is the sequence that we know of; attachment leads to inner disturbances, these disturbances lead to a loss of clarity, and then to the death of wisdom and creativity. The association with a sense object gives birth to a desire; fulfilment of that desire creates another attraction, and association with another object leads to creation of more desires. This concept in yoga is known as raga, attraction or attachment. The unfulfilled desire leads to frustration, aggression and anger, which leads to the second yogic concept of dwesha, repulsion. This obsession, either with attraction or repulsion, leads to cloudiness of mind. Of course, when the mind is clouded, then even the experiences which we have gained in the



course of our life, in knowing the good from the bad, the right from the wrong, and the just from the unjust, are clouded. If a mirror is covered with a layer of dust, then no matter how we look, we will not be able to see our own reflection. The dust on top of the mirror is the cloudiness of thought and the cloudiness of knowledge. Thus the story continues, until there is absolute death of human creativity, vitality and dynamism. This was the beginning of yogic psychology about five thousand years ago.

The statements by Sri Krishna lay down the foundation stone for the development and understanding of human psychology, as per the principles of sannyasa and yoga. It has been stated that our involvement in the world of the senses in the manifest dimension, represents a partial involvement of spirit in relation to creation. Let us

understand this in a different way. You are a person and I am a person. Do we only look at this from an intellectual level, or is there scope for understanding the feelings? Is there scope to actively participate in the journey of life? If we say that we can actively participate in this world only through the intellect, then it would be a wrong understanding of our nature and our life. In expressing the qualities of life we use all the faculties of intellect, intelligence, emotions, senses, attitudes, perceptions, understandings, and so on.

Similarly, the involvement of spirit in this manifest dimension is not only sensorial, and it is not only rational, but it also covers the unmanifest dimensions or grounds which exist deep within us. The other dimensions, where spirit expresses itself, can be realized only when we have

been able to divert our attention from the sensorial experiences, and try to see or become aware of the other areas which are non-sensorial. In order to divert perception and attention, you have to follow a process of moving your awareness from one point to the other. This displacement of consciousness, or this displacement of awareness, from one object to another and then to another, represents the sequence of detachment or vairagya. It is the same process as when we go to a park to admire the flowers and the beauty there. We do not keep looking at one flower or one beautiful object all the time. When we look at something nice, there is a craving or desire for it, and appreciation of it. However, once we shift our attention, the influence of the previous object is not so strong and powerful as it was when we were looking at it before. I look at this flower: it is beautiful, red, attractive, purely vibrant, and I appreciate it and I like it. Then I look at the other flower. It is again a beautiful flower: vibrant and colourful, but my attention has shifted from the first to the next. Therefore, vairagya has taken place with the first flower, and raga has taken place with the second flower. Raga is attraction, and when I look at the third flower, vairagya is taking place with the second, and raga will be associated in my mind with the third flower.

The process is even stronger when it occurs with our ego. It is the ego which creates a strong desire to possess an object. It is this possessiveness which leads to the creation of an obsessive personality. It happens in such a subtle way that we are not even aware that it is happening. However, the current is so strong that we are pulled and drawn into the current, and we cannot free ourselves from it. Sri Krishna also defines for Arjuna the method to overcome such deep, obsessive attractions or desires. The method is the simple idea of detachment: the

transfer of awareness and perception from the material on to something else. The idea is a very simple one, and the practice is a very simple one, but our ego association causes fear, insecurity and questions, “Do I have to leave this? Do I have to leave that? What will be my condition or state of being if I leave something behind?”

The concept of renunciation has been associated with leaving behind things, whereas the concept of sannyasa has been associated with the displacement of awareness from one object of attraction to another object of attraction. The mind is attracted to the material, sensorial, sensual world. That is where it is moving towards, so we shift that awareness to the dimension of spiritual awareness and experience. The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali state clearly that when the mind becomes free of the craving of objects, you do not even desire things that you see, hear, taste, feel, or smell. Rather, there is an attitude of the seer, a witness to the experience. Then you have attained vairagya. This detachment is a twofold one: one is the mundane, and the other is the transcendental. On the mundane level, vairagya takes place in relation to



the attraction of the senses and the attractions of mind; and in the transcendental dimension, it takes place in becoming aware of the desire to become enlightened.

I will give you a simple example, which I am sure many of you might have experienced in your own lives. When we meditate, there are times when we have fantastic visions or experiences, and we see many beautiful colours, and we wish to repeat them in subsequent practices. Sometimes we see the vision of God, or guru, or angels appearing, and we love that experience immensely. We feel that such visions indicate that we are progressing very fast, evolving and becoming spiritual. After some time, we find that nothing is coming and we are back into being the old self. Then we start to think that what we are attempting to do is wrong. Or we question whether it is appropriate, or if we should do this, or if we should do that. Sometimes, when in our meditations we see a man with two horns growing from his head, then we start thinking that we have regressed in our meditation and spiritual journey. Even in meditation there are expectations. Even in meditation there is rejection of experiences. If it is going to be rejection of certain experiences and looking forward to some better experiences, then meditation is not going to take us far. On the one hand, we have become attached to something beautiful which was the creation of our own mind. On the other hand, we reject and avoid another expression or experience which is also a creation of our own mind. When people say this to me, I know that meditation has not failed them, but they have failed themselves. I do not have an answer for such people. I can only try, and take it as the guru's word that maybe one day they will succeed. Such attachments or attractions to what we consider nice and beautiful, and rejection of what we consider not nice and not beautiful, are natural instincts of the human personality.

Vairagya leads to an understanding and an awareness of these inner processes, which make us realize the beauty of life, and which make us reject the ugliness in life. Where yoga tells you to become aware of what is happening, sannyasa tells you to live what is happening. Where yoga tells you to observe your own responses, interactions and behaviour, in relation to a situation, condition or object of pleasure, sannyasa tells you to live that experience with greater understanding of your true self and of your true nature. This vairagya leads to a development of faith and trust in relation to oneself. Faith is awakened when vairagya is attained, trust is developed when vairagya is attained, and the will is born when vairagya is attained.

The concept of renunciation has been associated with leaving behind things, whereas the concept of sannyasa has been associated with the displacement of awareness from one object of attraction to another object of attraction.

In order to attain vairagya there has to be a greater understanding of the mental nature. Where yoga speaks of the five yamas and the five niyamas, in sannyasa we have twenty-five yamas and twenty-five niyamas. We are not going to discuss all the sannyasa yamas and niyamas, nor all of yoga, only the important ones, which can help remove the cloudy nature of our perceptions and personalities. The first thing, of course, is to become aware of the truthful nature and the truthful aspect of the human personality. Experience the truthful nature, and

not falsity or hypocrisy. That is a very difficult sadhana. It is easy to practise meditation. It is easy to practise kriya yoga and kundalini yoga, but it is difficult to practise observation of the truth. Let us simply ask one question of ourselves, “Am I truthful or not?” Be sincere with your answer; don’t be a hypocrite. Being truthful is a very hard thing to do, and in order to hide the falsity that exists in our life, we adopt different roles, different identities and different personalities. However, once this quality of truth is awakened within a person, very little remains to be attained. It is the same with the idea of total absence of violence and aggression from our personality, thought, behaviour and action. This is the concept of ahimsa, but it is next to impossible to attain it. Nevertheless, these are the possibilities that we can attain and experience, provided we are sincere and committed to the process of transformation and accept this change, as it happens, as a sannyasin. When we create a beautiful picture, the creation of the picture begins with the first stroke of the brush. Therefore, do not worry whether you will create the picture in your life or not, but worry about how you can make the first stroke of the brush on the canvas of your life. This conviction, that I can make the first stroke on the canvas, is the conviction which initiates the process of sannyasa in one’s life.

In the life of sannyasa, we undergo changes that allow us to develop better human qualities of character, and allow us to transcend the limitations and restrictions which we encounter in our day-to-day environment and responses to those environmental situations. The effort, which one makes in the process of sannyasa to attain the transformations, indicates a process in which we begin to open ourselves. The traditions have said that in order to fully experience sannyasa, there has to be a generation of faith and willpower. Willpower gives you the strength

to accept the change and the transformation. Faith is a threefold experience: faith in oneself, faith in the master, and faith in the divine will. Faith in oneself represents the component of trust, the ‘yes’ that I can achieve. Faith in the guru represents the component of knowledge that I am being guided, and this guidance is going to open up new dimensions of creativity in my life. Faith in God indicates the ability to let go of our moorings and attachments, and to live in harmony with the divine will. Letting go of the moorings or the attachments, leads to the experience of the sannyasa life.



There were four Greek sannyasins in Munger last year, and one day they decided to go rowing on the river. However, I did not give them permission. So, in the night, they jumped the ashram wall, went to the river bank and got into the boat. They started rowing with all their strength. They rowed the whole night. Next morning, when the sun rose, one Greek said, “The scenery is the same all over the banks of the river.” The other Greek said, “Yes, even the people look the same as they looked at Munger.” The third Greek said, “Even the group of swamis

who are moving in the distance, look the same as they did in Munger.” A fourth Greek said, “Even the person with the stick in his hand looks similar to Swami Niranjan whom we left in Munger.” You know what had happened. They rowed the whole night, but they had not untied the boat. That is how we behave in our own life too. We say, “Yes I want to progress on my spiritual path, but let me hold this attraction, or this attachment to this thing.” However, it is only when we let go of our desires and our instincts that we can evolve and progress. It is only when we learn to let go and not hold anything for self-gratification and self-satisfaction, it is only when we are able to release



the moorings that hold our personality down that we can really and truly understand what spiritual life is about.

The triggers for having experiences in spiritual life can be anything. It can be an inspiration; it can be an act of sadhana. It can just be a selfless action. It can be an intellectual comprehension. We know the story of Archimedes. He was given a problem. He thought about it and found the solution in the middle of his bath. He jumped out of the bath shouting, “Eureka”, and ran immediately to the court. His motivation and understanding was so powerful that he

forgot all about himself, the state of his body and where he was. Anything, any event, any action can become a trigger, a realization of that spiritual power and of that spiritual dimension, provided there is intensity in your actions. It is this inner intensity that can help us overcome many different situations and difficulties in life. As sannyasins, we try to develop an intensity of faith, of action and knowledge, and this leads to the culmination of the journey which we began.



Sannyasa it is not a passive tradition; rather, it is an active and a dynamic tradition. Even when you meditate, there has to be intensity in the meditation. Even if you practise sadhana, there has to be intensity in that sadhana. It is through intensity that we can overcome our karmas and samskaras, and become free. The Sufis have expressed this intensity in devotion through dance and music, and they have attained great spiritual heights. Yogis have expressed this intensity in their sadhanas, and have attained great spiritual heights. Sannyasins

have shown intensity in the path of sannyasa, and have attained great heights. It is the coming together of all the human qualities, along with effort, which becomes the cause of intensity. When you can develop intensity in love, you are there; when you can develop intensity in compassion, you are there; when you can develop intensity in truthfulness, you are there; and when you can develop intensity in ahimsa, you are there. Sannyasa

believes that it is not enough to only think about the concept, but also to awaken the force, the strength, and the courage within that concept, to make it a stepping-stone for higher attainments. Therefore, sannyasa is not only a concept, but it represents a special character and a special expression of the individual. This special character or expression can be developed with the help of yoga practices.

—Discourse at Satyanandashram Hellas,
30 March 2000

Learning to Flow Like Water

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

During the last two days we have been looking at the tradition of sannyasa, the inspiration and the process of sannyasa. One thing which I would like to remind you about again, is that sannyasa is not only one understanding or one process of life. Definitely, the aim is to develop and awaken the creative spiritual energy inside, and to realize that spiritual energy is part of our natural, material life. It is an aim which can be attained, no doubt. At the same time, there has to be an understanding of the tradition from which this idea stems, and there has to be an understanding of the process which leads to the fulfilment and culmination of sannyasa in one's life. This process is the sadhana and the attitude of sannyasa. The third thing which we need to understand is the expression of the sannyasa qualities in our life. How do we do it? How do we find balance in expressing it?

In brief, the tradition of sannyasa begins with God. God is not a selfish person; God is somebody who cares with equal intensity for each of us. A tree has many flowers and fruits. It nourishes not one or two or three flowers and not one or two or three fruits, but the entire range of flowers and fruits that take birth from the tree. This is a lesson which we need to derive from witnessing a tree. God is the most selfless, compassionate and caring aspect of one's life. God is the essence of one's life, and that essence of life vibrates within each one, regardless of whether you believe in God or you do not believe in God, or whether you accept God or you do not accept God. It

should be understood that it is not through intellectual comprehension that we can realize this transcendental reality and concept, but it is through experiencing its vibrancy in our life that we can realize it. It is this vibrancy of life that a sannyasin tries to connect with.

This vibrancy can be experienced in many different ways and situations. Different connections can become a catalyst to provide an understanding of this vibrancy. In these last three days we have been hearing the experiences of many sannyasins. We have heard in each situation that it has been a connection with their heart. This is the energy with which they have been connected. This connection can be understood and appreciated either with the instruction as simple as "Teach yoga and don't worry about anything else", or "Retire into the mountains, live in solitude, take the vow of poverty and chastity, and

live a pious life." Whatever the case may be, it is not the mind which appreciates or accepts, but the heart which has to learn how to appreciate and accept. This learning comes through knowing one's conditionings in life, and all conditionings cannot be understood rationally, as there are also irrational conditions which influence us.

You might have heard the story of the camel caravan that Paramahamsaji told us many times in the course of his teachings. Once, there was a camel caravan going through the desert, consisting of over three or four hundred camels. One night, when the entire caravan was settling down to sleep and the camels were being tied to their hitching pins, they found that they were one hitching pin short. The camel drivers began to worry as they would not be able to tie up one camel. The hitching pin was lost, and there was a possibility that the camel would run off in the



middle of the night and nobody would find it the next day. In the middle of nowhere, every camel is as valuable and useful as the next one. One elder suggested that they go through the same motions of hitching the camel, without actually tying him to a rope. The people tried it, and the camel sat down quietly, and everybody went to sleep. Next day they got up, packed up the camels and they were ready to move. However, the untied camel would not move. The people had forgotten that they went through the motions of tying it down. This was a big dilemma, as the sun was rising high in the sky, and it was getting hot. The camel was not tied to anything, but it would not move. Ultimately, the wise man came to the rescue. He told the other drivers to go through the same motions of untying the camel as they had done with the others. After they went through the motions of untying the camel, the camel got up and started to move. Although the camel was never tied down it believed it was tied down. We are also like that. Paramahamsaji used to say we are sick as we think we are sick. He used to say we suffer as we think we are suffering. We feel pain as we think we are experiencing pain. All these different situations in life represent the conditioning where we begin to believe what we are not.

What do spiritual masters do? They simply go through the motions of untying us, and we feel we have become free and we act free. When they go through the motions of freeing us, we begin to develop an understanding, an awareness and a realization that now we can move. Intellectually we may think, "Oh it is a wonderful thing. Now I know I am free. Nothing can stop me any more." However, knowing is not enough; realizing is more important. This realization of the vibrancy in life which connects the individual with the universe is experienced as we undergo changes in our attitudes, and as we progress with our sadhana.

The aim of sadhana is not to make one spiritual with the idea of becoming a prophet with an eye on profit. The aim of sadhana is to remove accumulated impressions and ideas, and to become innocent, pure and simple. There are no shortcuts in this. You know the story of the three wise men who came to see Jesus at the time of his birth? Originally they were not three, they were five. Two had decided to take a shortcut, and they never reached where they wanted to go. It has been my experience that in spiritual life there are no shortcuts at all, but a defined way. Therefore, the continuous attempt, regularity and belief in sadhana, is an important factor in the sannyasin's life. It is this process which gives an understanding of the sequence and the flow of spiritual vibrancy, as it has come down from God to the present-day generation. Once we begin to experience this vibrancy in the form of an

inspiration, or in the form of an understanding, or in form of a balanced emotion, we become free and vibrant in our own lives. The instincts that govern life are transcended.

There are four basic instincts. First, a craving for satisfaction: physical, sensorial, mental, emotional and intellectual. We are all subject to this instinctive conditioning. The second instinct is the fears and insecurities that crop up when we feel we are going to lose our attachment to objects, things and people which give us satisfaction and pleasure. The third instinct is that of sleep and retirement from things which we consider too difficult to manage and handle. Sleep, not in relation to the act of sleeping at night, but in relation to hiding from things which we consider unattainable and too difficult. Closing the eyes to the reality is sleep. The fourth instinct is the instinct of becoming many from one, what



is known as procreation, what is known as sexuality. These are the instincts which tie a person down to the mundane, sensorial plane. Desires are not bad; do not misunderstand what I am saying. It is our perception of these desires which we need to understand. If we become desireless then all the ties that hold us down to this body and this plane are shattered. We cease to exist in this dimension, this plane, this body, this society, this time and this space. The sannyasa ideal is to convert these desires, which hold us down to these dimensions, and increase the power, strength and efficiency of the desire to experience something different, sublime, transcendental and divine. This is where the sannyasa lifestyle comes in, in order to



develop an understanding of the conditionings, instincts and desires that hold us down.

If sannyasa was only a mental process, one could live anywhere and be a sannyasin. You are not the first person to think about it. You are not the first person to enquire about whether you can lead a marital life and also be a poorna sannyasin, whether you can raise a family and be a poorna sannyasin, whether you can live in society and be a poorna sannyasin. When I use the term 'poorna sannyasa', I mean the total ideal of sannyasa. In fact, there has been much debate in the past and within the tradition by different masters, and they came to the conclusion that the ultimate ideal of sannyasa is different from the ideals of a social and marital life. Therefore, in the strict sense of traditional sannyasa, people do not accept relationships, for when we are involved with these conditionings, these desires and these instincts, we are definitely feeding our mind but starving the spirit. The spirit desires to be free from the conditionings of the mind, and in sannyasa we feed the spirit and transcend the mind. To our conditioned self such acts seem to be very hard and difficult, but to an unconditioned mind this does not matter.

If I ask myself, "Have I missed anything by not following the conditioning of my mind?" Today I can answer, "No, I have not missed anything." However, initially, for many who are in that condition, who live according to that condition, they find it very difficult to manage these conditions which influence and colour the perceptions in life. The process of overcoming the conditionings of a lifestyle is incorporated in the tradition. This lifestyle helps us live a life in the conditioned environment and at the same time attempt to become free. The needs of body and mind are channelled directly through the process of yoga and other sadhanas. Thus, in the strictest sense of the word, sannyasa is not for everyone. It is not

for someone who does not have the drive, motivation, courage and strength to face the realities that exist within oneself. Of course, there are no simple solutions to managing the conditions that we encounter in life, but only right choices.

Many years ago, when I was still a child, Paramahamsaji told me once, "Niranjan, never expect simple solutions in life. Rather, look for the intelligent choices, which can help you come out of a situation in life." Today I understand the force and the validity of this statement, as I have been able to witness myself in all times of pain and pleasure, of trials and tribulations, and of success and achievements. I realize today that there were no solutions; rather, there were conscious choices, which I made to achieve the sense of satisfaction, completeness and wholeness in life. We all make such choices, sometimes consciously and sometimes unconsciously. When we make a choice consciously we are recognized as a strong person, a strong personality, possessing a strong mentality. When the unconscious choice moves us, we recognize ourselves as having surrendered to the divine will. One important thing is to never allow any conditions or situations to become a barrier in the path of spiritual progress. There has to be wisdom and realization of one's strengths.

Once, a master came down from his hermitage with some of his disciples, after living in the hermitage in absolute isolation for about forty years. The master and the disciples had gone into the hermitage at the same time, had lived the same life and had practised the same sadhanas for forty years. When they came down, they visited the local town beneath the mountain. There the master simply went into a pub and ordered a big barrel of wine. The disciples said, "Well, if it is all right for the master, it is all right for us. If master is able to drink wine, then why can't we also enjoy it?" They all got drunk. After

staggering out of the pub, the master went into a red light district and all the disciples said, "Well, if the master can go there, why not us?" After some time they continued with their wanderings down the street, and there was a man who was melting glass. The master stopped and picked up a whole container of melted glass, and gluck, gluck, gluck, drank it. Do you know what his disciples said, "Only masters could do this; it is not for us." When the master was doing everything else, they followed him, but when the master was drinking the melted glass, they said that only he could do it and that it was not for them.

If you have the will to copy, then copy everything. If you have the will for only enjoyment, then you can only reach up to a certain point and not beyond it. It is only when we are able to change our conditionings and conditioned perceptions, and begin to experience the joy, the creativity and vibrancy in life that we can truly become free from the things that hold us down. However, an attempt can definitely be made by us to realize that spiritual vibrancy which is the source of our own life. It is the fountain of life; it is the philosopher's stone which exists within us. However, we have to remove the veil. The light is shining, but if it has many covers of cloth, the radiance will be much less. In order to see the brilliance of the light, it is not only necessary to switch it on, but also to remove all the coverings which prohibit the projection of light. The clarity of the spiritual self is blinded, and the brilliance of the spiritual self is clouded through the coverings of our own conditions, instincts and desires. Therefore, when you make an attempt to come in contact with that fountain of joy which is within, you have to integrate three things: the lifestyle, the sadhana, and the connection with the tradition. Then sannyasa is realized. This means placing in trust the qualities and the strengths which are contained within

for the development of life, which are experienced personally and also globally.

In today's world the ability which sannyasa gives us is the ability to flow like water. Water always flows down, it never flows up. Water always goes around obstacles, without fighting or struggling with them. Can you compare yourself to water? You want to flow up. You don't want to go around obstacles, you want to confront them. Sannyasa is flowing down from head to heart. Sannyasa is developing an understanding of situations which inhibit your creativity, and simply managing them by moving around obstacles. When we begin to flow, we eventually lose our identity and find the source. It has been said in the scriptures that the spirit resides in the heart. However, when we start searching for the spirit, we search in our head. Once we find the spirit in our hearts, by flowing down from the head to the heart, then union and merging takes place. The river loses its identity after merging with the ocean. Sannyasa is learning how to flow: learning how to flow in action, how to flow in love, how to flow in unity, and how to flow in adjustments without confrontation. This is the lesson which we can derive from the sannyasa way of life and ideals. For those who have strength and courage, let them walk the narrow path. Those who have the will and desire to appreciate and understand, let them begin the journey by walking the broad path.

I will tell you one last story before we finish: A man purchased a horse. He sat on the horse, but the horse would not move. He asked the person who had sold the horse, "How do I make this horse move?" The man said, "This horse is very well-trained. If you want to make it go, say 'Jesus Christ'. If you want to make it stop, say 'Amen'." The man said, "Jesus Christ", and the horse started to gallop. While the horse was galloping, there was a storm with thunder, lightning and rain, and a branch hit the

man in his eye and he was momentarily blinded. While he was blinded the horse continued to gallop, and when the man was able to open his eyes and find his bearings he said, "Amen", and the horse stopped. Suddenly the man realized that the horse had come to the edge of a precipice, and that it had stopped right at the edge. Looking down, the man said, "Jesus Christ". Find your own meaning to this story!

—Discourse at Satyanandashram Hellas,
31 March 2000



Twelve New Ferryman

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

We have been talking about an inner or spiritual vibrancy which helps to nourish the roots of life. We have also spoken about realizing the connection which a human being has with nature and with the divine, and how this connection was experienced and understood in the vedic times. That was represented by the yajna which was conducted today. While the yajna was being conducted, there was also an opportunity for people to receive initiation in mantra, jignasu sannyasa, karma sannyasa and poorna sannyasa. This is an attempt to connect with the inner source.

What we have seen today is not a religious practice. Invoking the cosmic powers to manifest in one's life and opening ourselves up to experience that cosmic and universal power in our life, is a very natural spiritual aspiration of every human being. Each culture, each civilization and each community has evolved a way of experiencing this descent of energy. These are expressions of the personal desire to become universal rather than individual. If the love of God is universal, if the experience of God is universal, and if the existence of God is universal, then how can we, as human beings, who are an expression of God's nature, remain self-centred and self-contained? There is a deep inner drive to overcome these self-centred perceptions and experience the spiritual joy which unites us with the creation, the life force and the life forms in creation.



The outer expression of this drive is an attempt to be loved and to love, to become friendly. If the drive to expand was not a human attempt, we would not be seeking love, friendship, or companionship. We would withdraw ourselves. The attempt which we all make to find love, happiness, peace, friendship and companionship in the outer dimension is only an indication of a process which is internal.

All the traditions have said, "What you express outside for other people, learn to express that inside towards your inner being." If you seek comfort and love externally, find that comfort by loving and experiencing the love internally. If you seek comfort by searching for

friendship and recognition outside, find that comfort by experiencing that recognition and friendship on the inner plane. Just as we connect with the other person and go ga-ga over the other person, we connect with ourselves and go ga-ga over our inner selves. In the Spanish army, during the war, a commandant called his soldiers and said to them, "You have to be very strong and very brave, as now the enemy, who we are going to meet, is going to engage in man-to-man combat." One soldier raised his hand and said, "Excuse me, Commandant, will it be possible for you to introduce those people beforehand, so that we can come to some agreement?" Maybe this is the approach we need to adopt with ourselves. There is face-to-face confrontation with ourselves, and there is struggle and fighting. This struggle and fighting need not happen and should not happen. Meet yourself beforehand and come to an agreement and understanding, then there is no need to fight or struggle.

There is always a drive in a person to realize their true nature. This true nature is the recognition of beauty; it is the recognition of the auspicious qualities which uplift us; and it is the recognition of the truth which nourishes us. Emancipation does not come by isolating oneself from this motivation and drive to understand and experience. Emancipation, happiness and peace come when we are able to commit ourselves to the motivation which leads us to experience our own strength. This should be the aim of people who think about spiritual life, who take initiations, and who adopt a specific path. Ultimately, we all come back to our centre, whether we like it or not.

It has been an auspicious beginning for the new millennium that we are able to see the coming together of various approaches, which may be culturally different, but have a common aim. It has been a good beginning for Greece too, for today, without any calculations or

pre-planning, twelve people have been initiated into poorna sannyasa. Twelve is a lucky number for any kind of beginning. The number has one and two in it. One is the first number and represents the one vision. Two comes second and represents the person and his effort to reach out to another being. One plus two becomes three, and three contains the qualities of omniscience, omnipotence and omnipresence.



Those who have taken poorna sannyasa should know that they have not taken it for their peace, their emancipation or their freedom. There are many people who wish to cross the ocean of samsara, and they do cross it. However, there are some who never cross it. Who are those people? They are the ferrymen. They spend their entire life on the ferry, going from one place to the other, but never actually belonging to any place. All the time, their effort is to take another person across. We have twelve new ferrymen, who will never cross the ocean, but who will help other people cross it. Your good wishes, love and support to these sannyasins will go a long way to build up their confidence and strength.

Prior to poorna sannyasa they may have had the aspiration, “One day I shall be able to cross over and find my comfort and luxury.” Now they have even sacrificed that desire. Or maybe not them, but I, forcefully, have made them sacrifice that desire. By sacrificing this desire they have taken greater responsibility upon themselves. While others can rest sometimes, they will have no time to rest. Even while others can enjoy relaxing on a boat when they travel, they will have to struggle and push the oars continuously. As sannyasins, you represent the drive, the motivation and the will which can take people from one side of the river to the other side.

The twelve people who have joined this bandwagon of hard workers, will now introduce themselves. They were hard workers before. However, in the course of time, I am sure they will begin to understand what hard work really means. This is my expectation from them. Understand what hard work really means; life is not a bed of roses, and each experience in life is a challenge containing wisdom and learning. Open yourself to that learning and challenge, and you will find that you do not need to put any effort. Rather, you are able to sail smoothly. All our love, good wishes, support and affection reaches out to all of you: Swami Karmayogi Saraswati, Swami Dharmaratna Saraswati, Swami Harishakti Saraswati, Swami Ishananda Saraswati, Swami Karunaratna Saraswati, Swami Amritsagar Saraswati, Swami Vairagyaratna Saraswati, Swami Satyaprakash Saraswati, Swami Shambhujyoti Saraswati, Swami Agnidevi Saraswati, Swami Savitananda Saraswati, Swami Suryamitra Saraswati.

—Talk at Satyanandashram Hellas, 1 April 2000



The Vision of an Evolving Yoga

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

Guru is not a title. Rather, it is the name of the Almighty. The Almighty is perceived in the manifest form through different avatars, and in the unmanifest form as qualities which uplift the soul ultimately to unity with the transcendental nature.

The avatars or guides in the physical plane are recognized by a name. They can be called Rama, Krishna, Jesus, Buddha, Mohammed, anything. However, when we are talking of the impersonal or unmanifest nature, then what name or identity do we give? The qualities that uplift the human being are the qualities that represent different aspects of divinity. Therefore, it is said that the nature of God is shantam, peaceful; the nature of God is satyam, truthful; and the nature of God is sundaram, beautiful. The name is Shivam, the auspicious nature; the name is Brahman, the expanding vision and the expanding consciousness; and the name is Guru, the dispeller of darkness and ignorance.

What you believe to be the spiritual qualities indicate the representation or recognition of a divine quality. There is one door which never closes. When we visit a church, a mosque, or a temple, we find written there, "This is the house of God." We find written on the doors, "This is the doorway to heaven". However, underneath, in small print, it is always written, "Closed from 6 pm to 10 am." These external doors can close, but not the inner door. The inner door remains open all the time. However, in order to open



Swami Niranjan wearing the robe of a priest of the Independent Church of Australia, for the occasion of the Cosmic Mass.

that inner door, people have to overcome their animal instincts.

Previously, there would be a notice in front of people's homes saying, "Welcome". Now there is a notice which says, "Beware of the dog." Who is the dog? Is it the animal dog, or is it the person dog that we have to be careful of?

As we go further away from the source of our inspiration and the source of our life, an attempt has to be made to recognize those qualities and efforts which can inspire our mind to again unite with the source.

Swami Sivananda, our grandfather guru, had many disciples who are luminous in their own right. In this group of jewels that was spread by Swami Sivananda around the world, there is one jewel who is known as Swami Satyananda. Swami Sivananda gave a mission to Swami Satyananda. He said to him, "Propagate the message of yoga from door to door and from shore to shore." Paramahamsaji has been true to this inspiration which was received by him from his master. It was in 1963 that he planted the seed of the yogic movement in Munger, and that seed grew up to become the Bihar School of Yoga. It has become a mini-tree with branches spreading out in all directions. I am saying a mini-tree, not a full-grown tree, for a small tree has the possibilities of further growth. When the tree attains full maturity then there is no chance of growth.

It was in Munger that Paramahamsaji had many visions associated with spiritual life and yoga, and he received an indication that Munger was going to be the source of a yogic revival around the world. In the course of time, the seed of yoga was created at Ganga Darshan, and Ganga Darshan today is the inspiration for many movements and associations which are carrying forward this yogic mission. It is the inspiration for the development of the Satyananda Yoga system, also known as the Bihar Yoga system. It provides inspiration, motivation and direction to the International Yoga Fellowship Movement, to which we all belong. It is the inspiration for different associations which work in that place: Bihar School of Yoga, Sivananda Math, Bihar Yoga Bharati, Yoga Research Foundation, worldwide Satyananda Yoga Academies, and worldwide

Satyananda Yoga ashrams and centres. Therefore, Ganga Darshan is not only an institute of yoga, but also a movement in itself, reaching out to help people gain health, happiness, prosperity and fulfilment in life.

The inspiration for the vision, mission and motivation comes from a tradition which begins, in present times, with Swami Sivananda. Swami Sivananda is considered to be one of the greatest masters of the age who lived in the twentieth century and inspired countless people to live their lives through the divine will, in service of humanity and with devotion to the Almighty. The yogic inspiration, which flows through him, and also through his disciples, flows through Swami Satyananda as well. In the life of Paramahamsaji, we have seen that he has inspired many to live by the yogic principles, which means a life filled with bhakti, faithful and devoted to the Almighty, a life consecrated to seva, service for humanity, a life devoted in samarpan, surrender to the divine will, and a life steeped in sanyam, self-restraint. We are all trying to follow that path to the best of our abilities.

What are the institutions that are devoted to the course of this mission? The first is the Bihar School of Yoga, which is the premier institute of yogic learning. However, the highlight of the Bihar School has been the development of a system of teaching which is utilized in many areas of society. At present, work is going on with the army, prisons, sport associations, the police, academics, children, school teachers, medical colleges and hospitals.

From time to time, research on the outcome of this work is presented to the public in order to motivate them and help them understand the yogic process. One of the major thrusts for the teaching of yoga by the Bihar School of Yoga has been the application of yoga for the management of various illnesses and disorders. Regular courses and classes are conducted, such as health

management seminars, and courses for the management of respiratory disorders, diabetes, gynaecological problems, hypertension, bone problems, arthritis, back problems, digestive problems and other ailments. At the same time, in order to understand the sadhana aspect of yoga, spiritual development courses are conducted to train people in the principles of kriya yoga, kundalini yoga, mantra yoga, meditation and other advanced or scarcely known yogas.

The extension of the Bihar School of Yoga is the Bihar Yoga Bharati. The Bihar Yoga Bharati or the Bihar Yoga



University is the first recognized university of yoga in the world today. It was established in 1994, and on 28 March 2000 it got official recognition, on the very day we started the Sannyasa Festival here in Greece. It has received not only recognition of the institute as a university, but a few days ago the Government of India made another important decision. They have given permission for the Bihar Yoga University to open another university, in any part of the world, wherever required, and they

have offered to coordinate this effort by contacting the governments and the education departments of different countries. This has given us great satisfaction as, with this decision, we see the fulfilment of the dream that Swami Sivananda had but which he did not see come to life. It became the sankalpa of our guru to fulfil that wish of his guru. After creating the institution of Ganga Darshan, Paramahamsaji then renounced the establishments he had created. Thus, it was the third generation which made this dream come true.

The programs for the university, which have already developed and which will develop, are many. In fact, I have spent many sleepless nights thinking about what we are going to do. At present we are offering postgraduate master's courses in yoga philosophy, yoga psychology, and applied yogic sciences. This year we are starting a department of yoga ecology, and next year, if we are on schedule, we will start a department to study the different cultures and spiritual links that have existed down the ages. Already, as many of you know through your participation in some of the courses there, students from thirty-six countries are participating in the training imparted by the Bihar Yoga University. So, it is a real university, in the truest sense of the word, to create a global awareness.

The third institution is Sivananda Math, which is dedicated to the ideals that Swami Sivananda himself cherished in his lifetime. I call it the seva institute, the institute of service, looking after the needs of people who have nothing. There are approximately ten thousand families supported by Sivananda Math. They are provided with medical care, tools for self-employment, clothes, food and agricultural aids. Even shops have been opened for the financial gain and stability of the poor people who have nothing. Houses are constructed and donated to those who are shelterless. All these services take place



every day, every month, and every year. At the same time, every year, an opportunity is provided for people to come together and work together for the upliftment of the downtrodden, the poor, and the have-nots. Many of you have seen the work which is being undertaken by Sivananda Math. First is the construction of houses, second is the distribution of goods in the villages, third is the giving of vehicles or modes of self-employment, and fourth is the giving of kits to brides so they go as representatives of Lakshmi, the goddess of prosperity, to their new homes.

The next organization is the Yoga Research Foundation. It is a scientific research institute. It contacts scientific and medical researchers to define the role of yogic management for various disorders. It associates with different medical institutions, hospitals and professionals, and utilizes their assistance and facilities to come to an understanding of the yogic principles for the management of physiological and psychological illnesses.

The next institution is the Alakh Bara which many of you have visited. It is the place where Paramahamsaji now resides in Rikhia. The aims of the Alakh Bara are to promote the ideals of sannyasa. What are the ideals of sannyasa? Viveka, discrimination; vairagya, dispassion; seva, service; karuna, compassion; and atma nivedan, dedication to the higher self. It is here that the statement from the Bible comes true: "Those who have eyes see; those who have ears hear." If you go with your eyes covered, you will not see anything there. If you go with your ears covered, you will not hear anything there. Therefore, when you visit the Alakh Bara, open your eyes and your ears.

The next institution is the Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal, or the Children's Yoga Fellowship. It started in 1995 with seven children. This institute is dedicated to the development

of the total personality of children between the ages of seven and fourteen. It is managed totally by children, not by any grownups, and not even by me. I am not a member. The children have been trained as propagators of yoga, instructors of yoga and demonstrators of yoga. They have been trained by other children who are qualified in yoga training and education, which is imparted in 157 schools in India. Over the past five years, they have trained and coordinated the yogic education of approximately 40,000 children. The highlight of Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal is that every year it conducts a training program in Munger, where 5,000 children come together to practise yoga



Swami Niranjan with Rev. Antoinette Schoenmaker, Meritus of the Independent Church of Australia.

daily without their parents. Next time I come to Greece, I hope to bring you the video of that festival, which is so full of life, games, joy and bliss, that you will definitely be inspired to become a child once again.

Sometimes, people ask us questions such as, "Yoga is one. How is your training and your system

different to the other systems which are imparted around the world?" The way I perceive it is that the vision, which was given to us by Paramahamsaji, is the vision of an evolving yoga, which provides a complete understanding of the human personality. We do not stick to one form of yoga, but incorporate all forms in one structure. This integration has taken place with a lot of understanding and perception of human needs. Therefore, if we have to say what is the Satyananda Yoga system or the Bihar Yoga system, we can say that it is a system designed to promote physical wellbeing through classical hatha yoga and raja yoga. It is a system to promote mental stability through the practices of pratyahara, dharana, dhyana, mantra, raja yoga and bhakti yoga. It is a system to promote self-discovery through classical kriya yoga and kundalini yoga. It is a system to promote or provide prosperity through wisdom. This gives a brief explanation of the way the different yogas work. As you can see, the physical, mental, emotional, psychic, social and spiritual dimensions are covered by the different yogas, and each major yoga deals with one aspect.

Hatha yoga deals with the physical and psychic dimensions. Raja yoga deals with the mental, psychic and spiritual dimensions. Karma yoga deals with the physical, emotional, social and spiritual dimensions. The integrated system of Bihar Yoga aims to promote the wellbeing of all these dimensions. This is a definition of the attainments, through the different yogas, of the integrated system of Bihar Yoga. In the physical dimension, health, vitality and flexibility are the beginning of harmony which we experience when we practise yoga. Strength, relaxation, self-control and grace are attained. In the mental dimension, relaxation, concentration, memory, clarity, creativity, balance and awareness are attained. In the emotional dimension, equanimity, self-acceptance,

inner peace, the development of self-control and the transformation of the personality are attained. In the social dimension, service, interaction, awareness, responsibility, understanding and acceptance are attained. In the spiritual dimension, self-realization, expanded awareness, love, compassion, understanding, service, surrender and devotion are attained.

However, as I said before, the Bihar Yoga tradition is an evolving, developing and continuing tradition, and there have been many new discoveries by this institution of aspects of the yogic tradition from the ancient scriptures.

Many practices of yoga have been systematized, to provide a sequence which needs to be followed for an integrated development of the human nature and personality.

The next institution is the Yoga Publications Trust. This is a recent creation, which I established before coming to Europe, in order to propagate the message of yoga through literature, books, journals and magazines. Some of these publications are well known to you.

I feel proud to represent and belong to a tradition which is so dynamic, vibrant and alive.

—Discourse at Satyanandashram Hellas, 1 April 2000



Swami Nirajan and Swami Sivamurti with Rev. Antoinette Schoenmaker and Ursula Klein, from the Independent Church of Australia.

A Process of Transformation

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

During the last nine days we have been discussing the role of yoga in today's society. Yoga is a system of thought, a philosophy and a way of understanding, appreciating and accepting life. Yoga is a set of practices, which we can do to integrate the faculties and the qualities of body, mind and emotions, and realize the qualities of spirit. Yoga is also a process of personal transformation which leads to the improvement of the social and family environment.

The biggest contribution of yoga, according to my understanding, has been the gift of realizing the connection that exists between the material and spiritual dimension of a person. The great seers of the past have said that in order to experience wholeness and completeness in life, it is important to realize this connection that exists between the material expressions of a person and the spiritual aspirations. If you look at the various aspects and principles of yoga, you find that the process of transformation begins with the body. Yoga provides us with a deeper understanding of our own bodies. Our body is something which we have taken for granted and we have misused it. Our bodies are not just made up of muscles, bones and blood. Within each cell of the body there is a consciousness, an awareness. Through the physical practices of yoga, as we deepen our own perception and awareness, we realize the consciousness which lies dormant in the cells, in the various subtle bodies.



There are many possibilities which are hidden deep inside our physical bodies. Milk is only one product, but in milk is contained the possibility of converting it into butter, yoghurt and other products. How do we change the milk into other products? Through a process of transformation. A process that transforms the basic product of milk into other products. The yogis have seen the human body in the same way. Within the body there are other

experiences, which are recognized as manifestations of energy and of an inner and deeper mind, the universal mind or consciousness. With this understanding, yoga becomes a process of discovering the potential that lies hidden in the body, in the brain, in the emotions and in the spirit. With the practices of yoga we find that there is also an inner psychological transformation which takes place spontaneously and naturally.

Yoga provides us with the opportunity to experience the feelings that exist in different parts of the body, and to experience vitality, vibrancy and relaxation. This understanding of yoga has taken the whole concept and tradition from being a philosophical or mystical tradition to a system which can help develop the human personality, and create better human conditions and situations around the globe. Due to this, yoga is being accepted by diverse cultures around the world, where it is being applied for the development of a harmonious social environment. Yoga is not something new which has emerged in the last century. It has been part of the human effort to discover strength of character and strength of personality. There is no cultural or religious conflict with the concepts of yoga. If there is confusion, it is due to our inability to realize the full scope or the complete possibilities.

The social applications of yoga have been the most dynamic applications so far. Yoga has been included in therapies for the management of various psycho-physiological imbalances, illnesses and diseases. Last year, yoga was recognized officially as an alternative therapy in the UK. We are teaching the principles of yogic therapy in medical colleges and universities. Yoga has been recommended by doctors as part of the medical syllabus, for the medical system recognizes that present-day therapies treat the symptoms when they manifest, but not the cause of diseases.

When we use yoga to treat hypertension, we are treating the cause, which manifests due to some stress factors or imbalances in the person's body, lifestyle or personality. Doctors provide tablets and tranquillizers to control the hypertension, but are unable to manage the conditions which are the cause of the hypertension. When people suffer from asthma, they take bronchi-diluters to allow them to breathe more freely and easily, but they are not able to strengthen the weakened muscles. They do not become aware of the cause or improve the environment which has given that respiratory congestion in the form of bronchitis or asthma. The modern medical system is more of an emergency therapy, to provide some relief when we experience the emergence of a disturbed condition of the body or mind, and it is this disturbed condition which is known as disease. The modern system of medicine is a curative approach to manage a critical situation, and to provide temporary relief. But what about the promotion of health? What about the prevention of disease? This understanding we gain through yoga.

With this understanding, some medical professionals have investigated the effects of yoga in the management of many infirmities and illnesses, and today work is going on in the UK to see how the practices of yoga can help manage the conditions of AIDS and other life-threatening diseases, such as cancer. At present we are trying to undertake clinical research with the help of professionals, to study how yoga can even reverse the process of cancer. Today, many medical practitioners have come to the conclusion that a proper understanding and practice of yoga can help reverse different kinds of heart diseases. The therapeutic understanding, which we gain from yoga, has given us great hope that not only diseases can be reversed and cured, but also health can be promoted, and steps taken to prevent those conditions which make

us ill. As well as this, there have been other attempts to understand the psychological imbalances and how they can be helped through yoga. Psychosis, phobias, fears, anxieties, depression and addiction are now being looked into, and practitioners of yoga have started to conduct research into the improvement of patients' lives.

Therapy has been one application of yoga, but there are many other applications, such as how to improve the quality of mind by integrating yoga in the academic



environment of schools, colleges and universities. The development of the human personality is the main vision of yoga, for it is only when we realize the personality and become aware and harmonize our personality, that we open doors for wisdom and for other expressions of life.

In the social application of yoga there is wide scope for the correction of disturbed and dissipated mentalities. They can be calmed through yoga. Next year, with the help of the governments of South America, we are going to establish departments of yoga in different universities to study the role of yoga in the management of crime, addiction and sexuality.

In India, we teach yoga to the soldiers in the army. Not to make them follow the principles of non-violence or ahimsa, but to help them manage their psychological stress and traumas which they face during duty. Such training has already taken place in the Scandinavian countries and in Germany. Right now, we are in the process of training one army unit through the practices of yoga, without the help of any physical disciplines which are traditionally followed. We started this experiment last December. When we were training the new recruits in yoga, other people used to laugh. While all other recruits were going through hard physical exercise, the yoga unit was practising pawanmuktasana. While all other recruits were doing push-ups and lifting weights to increase their stamina, the yoga unit was practising alternate nostril breathing.

Just before I came to Greece a test was conducted with some men who had to undergo a sixteen-kilometre night march with forty-five pounds of weight on their backs. Out of forty of the non-yoga group and forty of the yoga group, thirteen failed from the non-yoga group and only three failed from the yoga group. This initial test, which is a normal procedure in the army, gave a lot of confidence to those who are practising yoga.

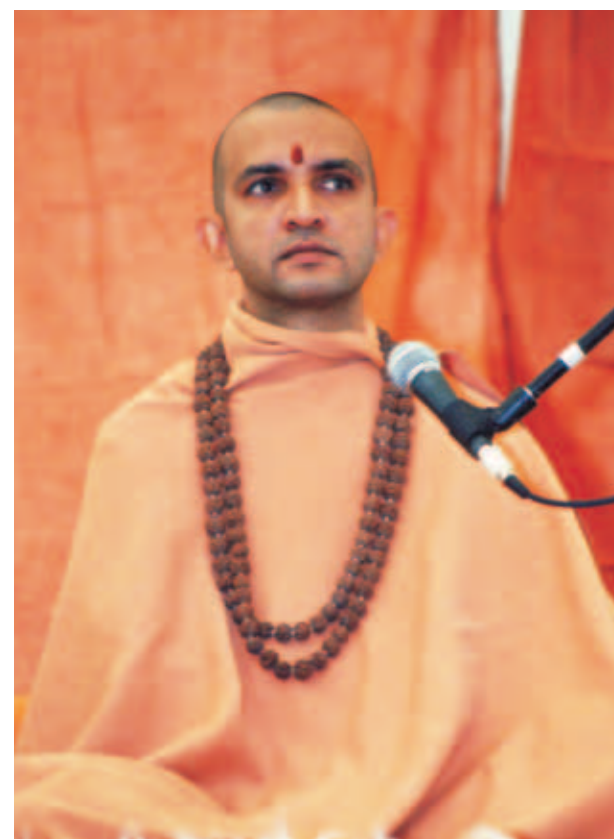
They had been concerned about how they would gain strength, dynamism and vitality if they did not do hard physical exercise. Our sannyasins have lived in tanks and experienced manoeuvres with army personnel to experience first-hand the conditions which the soldiers have to face. Our sannyasins have gone to the highest battlefield in the world, at 20,000 feet in the Himalayas, to experience the conditions which the soldiers have to face there. Programs have been devised, which are now being implemented, to improve the performance of the soldiers and to help them manage their psychological stresses and traumas. Thus, whether it be in the field of defence, education, therapy, or social environment, yoga is being applied more and more every day all over the world.

Of course, all these examples do not undermine the personal growth and development which each and every individual experiences. Yoga is taught in ashrams and yoga centres throughout the world, and not only in places where there is an acceptance of yoga, but also in places which are theologically opposed to yoga. Last December a yoga ashram community was approved by the clergy in Iran, as they realized that yoga was not anti-religion and that it helped to improve the human personality.

Ashrams are places where yogic education is imparted to everyone. There are many centres in the world that teach one aspect of yoga. Some teach only the physical, and some teach only the mental. That is happening because they see the immense possibilities of yoga as a means to earn some more drachmas. However, there are places in many different parts of the world where yoga is taught in its true spirit, and these places are known and recognized as ashrams or communities, where like-minded people live together and experiment with the process of transformation. There is no rushing the process of yoga. There is a natural evolution and growth

that we experience. In the course of time, as more and more people are trained in the principles of yoga, many communities are going to be created to help improve personal and social lifestyles.

Yoga is a practical process of development. A blind person, who sees the sun, aspires to experience the warmth and light of the sun. The desire to see the sun is only an aspiration and not the immediate need. The immediate need is to have eyes, and only through the eyes can the person see the sun. This principle applies to yoga: first have eyes and the ability to see, and then you



won't have to search for anything; you will be able to see everything. We are caught, as human beings, in a vicious cycle where our desires and ambitions play a major role in guiding and directing the life processes. However, yoga teachers have to take a step back, reassess their needs in life, and provide the means to attain and fulfil those needs. Yoga does not attempt to show you the sun; it attempts to provide you with the eyes by which you can see the sun.

—Discourse at Satyanandashram Hellas,
'Yoga Day', 2 April 2000

Satsang

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

Sannyasa and daily life

Q. How can a sannyasin deal with everyday life, family life and work, what attitude should he or she have?

Swamiji: There are two aspects of sannyasa life. The first aspect is the non-participation of a sannyasin in social life, and the second aspect is the participation of a sannyasin in social life. When you've grown wings on your back and you are flying, then it becomes irrelevant to ask, "What can I do to ground myself on earth and not fly?" If you have taken sannyasa, then you should not ask how you will deal with the responsibilities of society and family, as that concept does not exist in sannyasa. If you have such questions in your mind, then don't even bother taking sannyasa in the first place.

This has been a very important question on people's minds in today's age, so there has been a division or differentiation in understanding the concept of sannyasa. The traditional sannyasa or poorna sannyasa is a lifestyle in which you live alone, without any obligations, commitments or duties to your near and dear ones. In poorna sannyasa you do not identify with a family of three or four, with a father, mother, son and daughter, but you identify with the whole globe as one family. Even if you have a family and you are a poorna sannyasin, then you have to have the same feeling for your family members as you have for complete strangers. This relationship is based not on attachment, but on compassion and love for all.

I do not have a wife or children; it is a voluntary desire to remain alone. Paramahamsaji did not have a wife or children of his own; it was a voluntary desire to be alone.



Swami Sivananda did not have a wife or children; it was a voluntary desire to be alone. When this voluntary desire to be alone is positive, constructive and creative, then you feel the same sentiments for every being on the planet. Of course this path is possible only for a few.

The other system is that while you continue to live in the world with your commitments, responsibilities,

obligations and families, you develop an identity of sannyasa, which relates to your actions, and not to the final aspiration in life. Do not misunderstand me when I say that you associate or realize your actions, and not the final aspiration in life. We all have the same aspiration in life, which is the ultimate experience of one's nature and ability, to realize the connection between individuality and universality. You should also understand that we all experience different needs in life. Some people are happy leading a single life because there is no need of family support, or the support that is generated by leading a family life in terms of security and affection. Of course, this may not be applicable to the majority of people. Therefore, I said it is the path of the few. Others are conditioned to seek security, support and recognition from their near and dear ones, and this mentality is part of the social mentality. In this state of existence and mind, it is still possible to live a sannyasa life while being aware of our spiritual identity in the material world. The development of the spiritual identity, while living in the material world, is the system or the tradition of karma sannyasa: sannyasa in relation to one's actions, and placing in trust the actions which are performed by us. This is the path of karma sannyasa.

Karma sannyasa is a state of sannyasa in which leading a normal social life, with all the professional obligations, is permitted. At the same time, an effort is made to come into harmony with the inner spiritual aspirations. In the process of karma sannyasa you are asked to continue with your responsibilities and duties, while maintaining a time of sadhana, in which you can practise your sadhana and develop an independent identity. This independent identity leads to the development of awareness in relation to your desires and actions. Through sadhana, when you are able to understand your desires, and direct your actions in a more creative constructive and positive

way, the mind becomes free from the sources of deep attachments and obsessions.

What is the difference between sannyasa life and social life? In the social life you crave for recognition, support and security, friendship and love. It is this craving which becomes a strong desire and an obsession. This obsession influences your personality. It alters your behaviour and helps to identify the mind with the objects or situations, which can fulfil these desires or ambitions. When the mind becomes obsessive, it creates a conditioning from which it is very difficult to come out of.

When I ask myself what have I missed by taking poorna sannyasa, I say to myself I've missed nothing. I have gained a million times more love and affection, support and security than what I could have gained if I was leading a normal family life. There is no loss in terms of social belief or understanding. Rather, I would say there is a gain, and that gain has been in terms of freedom from obsessions and attachments.

It is only a matter of adjustment in life, either as karma sannyasins or as poorna sannyasins. When there are no immediate desires to bind the mind for the fulfilment of an ambition, then my creativity is free to express itself in another form. I don't have to worry about shelter, for I have the confidence that I can survive not only in a house, but also under a tree. I don't have to worry about food, for I know that even if I don't get bread and butter, I can live by eating the simplest things. I don't have to worry about clothes, for I know I can survive by wearing a fig leaf around my waist. Most of our attachments revolve around shelter, food and clothes, and it is this security we crave in life due to our social conditioning. Besides, there is no worry about finance, for I know that I can survive without money. Nor is there any worry about the education of my children, for I know I can educate others in a much better

way. If I have no other people to educate, I can at least educate myself to act and behave in a different way.

In poorna sannyasa the mind is not bound to expectations, desires, or the ideas of success and failure. Rather, it allows one the freedom to move like the wind in the world, sometimes with great force, and sometimes with passivity. If there are other poorna sannyasins around, then the emanations of energy from all of them becomes a greater force, which nourishes, supports and uplifts each sannyasin and all who come in contact with this energy.



However, the question is not in relation to poorna sannyasa; it is in relation to how to develop the identity of a sannyasin while living in the world with responsibilities, obligations and duties. For this reason, many years ago Paramahamsaji established the form of karma sannyasa initiation. He revived the tradition of karma sannyasa. It is not a new tradition; it is an ancient tradition. In karma sannyasa who cares whether you have expectations or not, whether you have responsibilities or not, whether you jump in the well or not; you have to follow your call in life while maintaining a spiritual awareness and a spiritual

identity within yourself. You are free to live your life as you wish, the only expectation is that while living that life, you try to develop awareness of your inner spiritual self, and be in harmony with that identity.

The principles of karma sannyasa say that during the twenty-four hours of each day, twenty-three hours should be spent as your normal social self, and the remaining one hour as your inner sannyasin self. While you develop the identity of a karma sannyasin, learn to be truthful to yourself, and to develop faith and trust in yourself. As karma sannyasins you can learn to be sincere and humble within yourself; you can learn to observe the plays of desires, ambitions and ego in your life; you can learn how to achieve and attain balance in the expressions of life, and inner peace, joy and happiness. Our grand master, Swami Sivananda, used to say that one ounce of practice is better than tons of theory. Similarly, one hour of karma sannyasa every day equals and balances twenty-three hours of the normal material life, and this is possibly one of the biggest achievements of karma sannyasa. Once the seed grows and sprouts, you can be assured that one day it will convert itself into a giant tree, where you and everyone else can find shade, coolness and enjoy the fruits. There is no denial of one's responsibilities and actions, there is no avoidance of one's responsibilities and actions; instead, you are able to perform them with greater clarity.

Q. If we accept that poorna sannyasa is a karmic fact, how do you explain that many people, who have it in their karma, react negatively even to the idea? Can the guru change the facts in such karma?

Swamiji: Karma is always identified with bondage, restrictions and inhibitions. Karma always means the restrictive and limiting dimension of the human personality. Karma also means even the beauty, which we experience in life, is conditioned and limited. Poorna sannyasa is an

attempt to outgrow or overcome the restrictions and limitations, and be free from the bondages. Sometimes the spirit is willing, but the mind is weak. The inspiration and the motivation are there, but the mind asks questions. Sometimes when the confusion is strong, the inspiration and motivation are clouded. In such situations, if there is no acceptance of the guru's will, then there is the possibility of falling back into the old traps of life.

One man was walking across mountains. It was dark, he did not see the road, and fell into a crevice. Somehow, while he was falling, he managed to hold on to one branch of a tree that was growing on the side of the cliff. He had fallen down about four hundred metres, and there was no way he could climb up again, and beneath him there was a drop of about two thousand metres, and he could not find any foothold. He started calling and shouting at the top of his voice, "Anybody who can hear me, please come and save me." However, it was too late in the day and there were no other tourists in the region. Everybody had retired for their nightcap and bed. In absolute desperation, he prayed and called out to God, "God please save me." Suddenly, the clouds parted, and a voice was heard, "If you want to be saved, let go of the branch you are holding on to." The man looked up and said, "Anyone else up there?"

So, in order to overcome the karmas, there has to be total acceptance and understanding of the will that inspires and motivates us. The guru cannot cut the karmas for us, no, he can only show us the path through which we can liberate ourselves from the bondages of the karma. There are some extraordinary people who find extraordinary gurus, and because of their compatibility, the guru is able to easily cut the karmas of the disciple. However, such situations come up maybe once every couple of thousands of years, and the rest of the time we

have to be guided, and hold in our hearts the inspiration which brought us to this path. If we are able to hold the inspiration then nothing is difficult. That is the challenge, even for sannyasins. In this life we are conditioned to identify with the traits of our mind and body. How far is it possible to ignore these traits, or even to transform them? It is very hard. Therefore, the best way to do it is to maintain your inspiration and surrender yourself, not to your expectations and ego, but to the will that moves within the life of everyone. Only then can we become free from our karmas. That will happen when, in our simplicity and innocence, grace smiles upon us. In order to enter the kingdom of heaven, be innocent, like a child; be humble and be pure. Thus it is written in the Bible. But how can we apply it in our life? That is the question which you have to answer yourself, and you will find the answer.

Q. What is the advantage of being initiated into poorna sannyasa? Will it be possible to realize the sannyasa qualities as a karma sannyasin? I felt in my heart the call of poorna sannyasa the first time I met you, but I have social responsibilities and a family. Perhaps it is right to serve as a karma sannyasin?

Swamiji: I have already differentiated between poorna sannyasa and karma sannyasa. Now comes the component of your desire. You may want poorna sannyasa, but you feel that karma sannyasa is more applicable. It is your thoughts, your perceptions, your desires. All I can suggest is that instead of following the sway of your emotions, look at yourself in practical terms. The aim will always be there. It is not going to disappear if you do not take poorna sannyasa.

You have to remember that sannyasa is a process of education. Education always begins with primary school, not with university. If you do not have the basic understanding of a primary and secondary education,

there is no use going to university. Therefore, I will not even suggest poorna sannyasa or karma sannyasa, but I will suggest jignasu sannyasa. Let the seed grow naturally in your life. Don't try to hasten the sprouting of the seed, as that will not be a natural process. Sannyasa is against such rush in life.

What is there to desire? The path and the aim are before you. You have to begin the journey with the first step. Why even say that you desire poorna sannyasa, but



your obligations and responsibilities do not permit you, therefore you feel karma sannyasa is the better way? There is no use saying this. Start the process of self-education. Learn the ABC, the consonants and the vowels, before you attempt to read a technical book. If you buy the technical book without knowing the alphabet, you will only have the satisfaction that you have the book, but you will not derive any wisdom or gain from having purchased it. My advice is: do not follow the call of your desires, but follow the call of your true aspiration. If the aspiration is to experience the ideals of sannyasa, then start with a basic education which begins with jignasu sannyasa.

Q. What are the signs which indicate we are ready to renounce the world, and what are the signs that indicate just a rejection of the world? Do we slip into renunciation naturally, or is it a karmic thing? Do we make a conscious decision which is supported by willpower?

Swamiji: You must have thought a great deal in order to write this question. The answer lies not in a philosophical interpretation or solution to this question, but in your own mind. Simplicity of thought, simplicity in behaviour, and serenity in life indicate the process of development. If you are able to attain these, then you will become a spiritual being. Ask yourself, "Am I simple, am I serene?" Try to find the answers to these two questions, "How can I attain simplicity? How can I attain serenity?"

Q. Is there a special reason for the different colours of clothes that the sannyasins have to wear? Why is there this difference? Why can't we wear our own clothes, for I think the real choice and feeling is in the heart, and has nothing to do with the outside. In nature we are all the same.

Swamiji: In nature we are not the same; this is a wrong concept. Out of six billion people in the world, can you find



two who look exactly the same? Physically we are not the same, mentally we are not the same, and emotionally we are not the same. Even if you clone yourself, you will still not be the same. That cloning will just be a slightly faded carbon copy of yourself. The qualities are also definitely different in each one. We express them according to our understanding. It is only when a person has realized the entirety of human experiences that he or she can become established in the heart, and become free. As long as we do not have the ability to understand the entirety of a situation, we have to follow a discipline which makes us realize that entirety.

You are not the first one to think about this. As I mentioned earlier, it was considered in the tradition many thousands of years ago by people who posed the

same question. It was decided that in order to create a structured discipline which could help develop the various facets of the human personality, there has to be a system which has a sequence and an understanding. This system, this sequence, or this development in one's life, which begins on the external plane, eventually helps to find its source of balance on the inner plane. It is also a gift of inspiration and trust that the master has given which has to be appreciated. If this appreciation does not exist in the relationship between the guru and the disciple, then what is the use of adopting a path, or a person, and saying, "You are my master and this is my path?" This is the first contradiction which we need to overcome in our life. We ask the master to give us a direction, a path, a system, a trust and a love, and then we say, "Thank you for giving

me all these, but I will manage myself and I will live my life as I wish.” What is the use of receiving it in the first place?

This is not something which I can explain to you through logic or rationality. It is something which has to be experienced when you are able to tune yourself to the concept of spiritual discipline. The various symbols act as catalysts to alter the mind pattern. The shaving of the head acts as a catalyst to alter a mental perception. Wearing a colour helps to alter the pattern of the mind. The awareness that goes with it, the trust and faith that goes with it, help to alter a pattern of thought. This alteration leads to the transformation of the conditionings, and when you are free from conditionings you experience a greater freedom. Once you are free from conditionings, and once you begin to feel that freedom, then these external symbols don’t mean anything. It is the same when your stomach is full. You are not attracted to any of the food laid out on the table. Food has no meaning until and unless you are hungry. Similarly, in order to satisfy spiritual hunger, it is important to know the systems adopted by the traditions to reach that state of fulfilment. There is nothing in the world which does not follow a system or a sequence. From birth to death we follow a natural system. In life we follow a social system. Our thoughts, which ask such questions, are guided by social conditionings. If you can overcome those conditionings, you will help yourself. If you can’t, despite having twenty million guidances and directions, you will not be able to move an inch forward. That conviction has to come from the heart.

Q. When the rational mind approaches vairagya, it can fall into a circular thinking trap. How is non-attachment from spiritual goals and sannyasa itself, achieved, that is, how important is samadhi in the sannyasa pursuit?

Swamiji: There are three questions here. First, when the rational mind attains vairagya, it does not fall into

a circular thinking trap. That circular thinking trap is raga, not vairagya. Second, how is non-attachment from spiritual goals and sannyasa itself achieved? The answer is: first define what your spiritual goals are and what your feeling for sannyasa is, and then we will talk about non-attachment from these things. Third, how important is samadhi in the sannyasa pursuit? Samadhi is a subject of yoga and not of sannyasa. Samadhi is described in yoga; creativity is described in sannyasa. If you had listened to what I have been saying in the last three days, you would not have asked this question. In all my talks on sannyasa, never once have I spoken of samadhi.

Guru-disciple relationship

Q. How can we distinguish if what one feels for the guru is feeling or emotion?

Swamiji: It depends on what you feel for the guru. If you feel protective about the guru, it is a feeling; if you feel angry with the guru, it is a feeling; if you feel love and affection for the guru, it is a feeling. Remember, emotion has no colour. Emotion creates a link, which is spiritual and internal and cannot be defined through a logical feeling.

Mothers have a special connection with their children. It seems that somewhere their souls are one. Even if the child is many miles away and something happens to the child, intuitively the mother knows that something has happened to her child. Did the mother know because of a feeling or because of an emotion? There have been many scientific researches, which have proved that such an inner link exists. The problem comes when we try to understand this inner link with the help of logic and intellect. It is not possible to understand, in linear sequential form, a connection which is much deeper and internal, and which goes beyond intellect and logic. Therefore, the link which one should try to develop is an emotional internal link,



which is non-linear, non-sequential, but spiritual. This can only happen when you have trust in yourself and the guru.

If the rock picked up by a sculptor cries out aloud and says, “Do not use your hammer and chisel on me”, then that rock will not attain the shape envisioned by the sculptor. That is the relationship between the guru and disciple. There is acceptance of the guru’s will in the life of the disciple, and that is the true emotion that leads to experiencing the inner union with the guru.

However, although we talk about the guru and disciple relationship, we don’t generally accept the guru and disciple relationship. There is hypocrisy in our behaviour. The disciple says to the guru, “I have made you my guru and I love you.” In the next breath the disciple says, “Live up to the expectations of my love, otherwise I may reject you.” In another breath the disciple says, “Live up to my expectations because, if not, I will feel hurt.” In this way, the disciple becomes the guru of the guru, and does not allow the guru to express his real nature in front of the disciple. The guru always has to have a kind and compassionate face; he cannot be firm and have a guru’s face.

Have you read the story of Milarepa's life? If Milarepa's guru had come to Greece you would have probably killed him for being so rough, rude, strong and inconsiderate. That is another reason why gurus never came to the West before. One came and he was crucified; another came to Greece and he was incarcerated. Socrates was incarcerated. Today you say he was a great person, but then? Today we all follow the path that Jesus showed us, but then? We are unclear as normal human beings on how to differentiate between feeling and emotion. This is the teaching: the relationship between guru and disciple must give a person the wisdom to know the difference between the two. Feelings are coloured by our expectations, and our concepts of morality, righteousness and justice. Emotion, without any kind of wrapping, leads to the experience of the pure and the transcendental. It is the connection that exists between individuals, between the disciple and master, and between the individual and God. Therefore, try to find the real emotion, and not the coloured emotion in the form of a feeling, to guide your actions, behaviour and understanding.

Q. Paramahamsaji used to say that his job as a guru was to take us to the guru within. Over the years I have slowly trusted the insight within myself, but I still need guidance and support. As a karma sannyasin, how do I balance my devotion to the guru, my commitment to his mission, my need for the guru's teaching and guidance, and discovering and trusting my inner guru?

Swamiji: It is true that the attempt, made by every guru, is to find the source of wisdom inside, which is recognized as the inner guru. As you involve yourself more in understanding the process of sadhana, and as you learn to see the responses and reactions of your life within your environment and situations, you will learn to adjust and adapt. It has been stated in the Ramayana that faith and



belief are the two eyes of the spiritual being. Faith and belief are not blind. If faith and belief become blind, then despite having two eyes, we remain blind. It is faith and belief which provide the strength for finding the balance between the external social life and the drive; they are the urge to experience the source of wisdom. In this context, faith is in relation to the practice or the path, and belief is in relation to the conviction and understanding, which we all carry within.

Q. What happens when the student does not really have feelings for the guru and when all he or she feels is deep respect? Is this how it should be, or is something wrong?

Swamiji: What kind of feeling are you referring to? Is there any other greater feeling than respect? I can't understand this question at all. What kind of feeling do you hope to associate with the guru? You can feel love, but love

without respect has no meaning. You can feel affection, but affection without respect has no meaning. You can feel attraction, but even attraction without respect has no meaning. You have answered this question yourself. Respect is a better quality than any of the feelings that you can enumerate.

Q. How can we be sure that we received some message from you, and that we are really in contact with you, with your spirit, energy, consciousness, and that it is not a product of our own imagination?

Swamiji: I do not give any messages because I am not a guru. All I can attempt is to inspire you to become friends with yourself. If you wish to give a name to this inspiration, then you can say it is message of friendship. However, from my perspective, it is not a message. It is an attempt to make you realize that it is necessary to become friends with oneself.

Mind and awareness

Q. It is very difficult for me to renounce love in relationships. Why is that? Do people, who renounce, have to deal with this desire? Why is love between two people so strong?

Swamiji: Love does not come into a relationship between a man and a woman. It is sensual fulfilment that comes into the relationship. Everybody has said, “Grow in love, don’t fall in love.” Everybody has said, “Develop love and don’t reject love.” However, human beings don’t know what love is. They think of sensuality as love; they think of sensorial and sensual fulfilment as love. They think that the sexual contact is an expression of love. Love is something different. When this love grows inside you, the relationship deepens even more, and it unites heart to heart and not mind to mind. Love is a very pure word. Do not bring down the concept of love by associating it



with the relationship between a man and a woman. Love leads to empathy; love leads to ecstasy. It is a very sacred word. Just as Om is considered to be sacred, love is also considered to be sacred. Maybe it is time we learnt to change the definition of love in relation to our life. One thing is definite, however: love is a connection of the heart and not the fulfilment of a desire. When the heart is connected, distance and closeness do not matter. Two beings may be physically apart, yet they always remain united in love.

Q. What does it mean when we say we are the mirrors of each other?

Swamiji: Ask the person who said it, I haven’t said it. How can another person be a mirror of me? How can I be a

mirror of you? I have my nature, I have my personality, and I have my way of life. I have my way of thinking, and you have yours. Nobody is a mirror of anybody else, only of himself or herself.

Q. Could you tell us something more about developing inner awareness in the form of drashta, in relation to our efforts to harmonize our inner and outer life, and develop a connection between them. Also, in relation to our efforts to bring the good qualities of the heart and mind together in a synchronized way?

Swamiji: A man came to me once in a very depressed state and was crying. He said, “Swamiji I have lost everything in my life. My wife has left me, my house is burnt down, I’ve gone bankrupt, my children have left me, my car is



crushed, my freezer is broken, my television doesn't work, and I have lost all interest in life. I don't know what to do. I think I am going to commit suicide." He was in such a bad state of mind that before I could even open my mouth, he stopped me and continued telling me his problems. He spoke for about an hour. Later he got up and went away. I had not even opened my mouth, not even once. Every time I would open my mouth he would say, "Swamiji you don't know the full extent of my problems." It was evening time, so I closed up shop and followed him out the gates. Outside the gates of Ganga Darshan there is a garden, and some children were playing there with their toys, dolls and cars. One of the dolls had been broken by one of the children, and the owner of the doll, a little girl, was crying.

I watched this man go up to the girl who was crying. He comforted her and said to her, "Look, don't worry, you can always get another doll and a better one." I said to him, "Why don't you apply this to yourself. You were telling me your TV is broken. Well, you can always get another one. You were telling me that your car is crushed. Well, you can buy another one. You were telling me your wife has left you. You can find another one. You were telling me your children have left you. You can raise another group of children. You are able to comfort another person, but you are not able to comfort yourself. If you are able to comfort yourself, then why this suffering? Have confidence in yourself. That is the key to success in life." Three years afterwards the man comes to me very happy with a new

set of kids and wife. I asked him, "You did not commit suicide?" He said, "Swamiji, I am so happy. I've never been happier in my life."

This is a story that indicates the concept of drashta. We are able to see other people, but we are unable to see ourselves. When we are able to see ourselves, then we become the seers, the drashtas. In order to become the witness of yourself, you have to rise above the waves that are created in the mind. Yoga has provided us with tools, in the form of pratyahara, to achieve this state of being. Just as we are able to advise other people on how they should live their lives, by being objective towards them, so we should be able to advise ourselves on how to live our life, by being objective towards ourselves. The aim of yoga is to make us aware of where we are in life, and how we respond to different life situations. When we are able to observe this, we become the seers, the witnesses of our own selves.





Q. Is it possible to meet our soul mate? How do you advise two people, who love each other, to live a harmonious life together?

Swamiji: I have heard many people say that they are looking for their soul mate. I have heard many people say they have found their soul mate. However, I have never seen anybody who has lived their whole life with their soul mate. Right or wrong?

You are associating soul mate with your concept of love and family life, which I think is inappropriate. It is difficult to find a mind mate, forget about a soul mate. It is difficult to find a person who is compatible with our own thoughts, perceptions, desires and aspirations, and with our mind. If you don't even know what the nature of your soul is, how can you find a soul mate? We don't even know the nature of our mind, therefore how can we find a proper mind mate? Only a person who has experienced the soul can find a soul mate, and since none of us fall into that category, I think our soul mate should only be God. The realization of the soul is a transcendental experience. If the transcendental nature is within me, then I have to link that experience with something which is also

transcendental. Water can merge with water without any difficulty; air can merge with air without any difficulty; fire can merge with fire without any difficulty; and the soul can merge with God without any difficulty. The essence, the substance and the quality of soul and God are one and the same. Once two things merge with each other, there is union. Oil will not merge with water. The mind will not merge with the soul. The mind is like oil. It is dense. The spirit is like water. Therefore, the true soul mate, in the life of everyone, is God, or a person in whom the energy of God is manifesting: the master.

Q. In his teachings, Swami Satyananda said that life is a combination of the positive and the negative, and if there were no conflicts, tensions, passions, jealousies, anxieties, worries or hatred, our minds would become very dull. Isn't it one of the sannyasin's goals to free the mind from these negative feelings and emotions? What does 'play with these emotions' mean?

Swamiji: Do you know how long it takes to free the mind from these traits? Can freedom be attained just by desiring the mind to become free? This is only a perception of life. We must have the ability to accept the positive and the negative, for they both come from our inner being, our inner perceptions, and our inner understanding. What makes you fight against the negative and what makes you accept the positive? Why are we unable to recognize that the negative is also a creation and an expression of our human nature and personality? The cause of major suffering in the world today is our inability to accept the other side of our personality. Not only Paramahamsaji, but every master, in every spiritual tradition, has said, "Accept both." We have to learn acceptance, and not rejection of what we consider to be bad, as well as acceptance of what we consider to be good. It is only when we recognize something to be restrictive and limiting that we make

an effort to go beyond that situation. It is only when we recognize something as negative that we make an attempt to convert it into a positive thing. This leads to a deeper knowledge, and a deeper vision or wisdom. With this increasing awareness, and deepening wisdom, eventually we become free.

Q. Even if we manage to love in a universal way, we will still probably feel more love for certain people. How can we love specific people, who touch our heart, more than others, and yet be detached?

Swamiji: It is natural that there will be a deeper attraction towards a person with whom there is a deeper empathy. That is an expression of the human mind. Love is an expression of the human mind, but empathy is a deeper expression of the human mind. While it is possible to love everybody in the same manner, it is not possible to have that empathy and that connection, with the same intensity, for everyone. Empathy means a fusion of hearts, and this fusion of hearts is not a common affair. Love can be a common affair. An example is that masters may love their disciples. However, the love is deeper and more intense on the side of empathy. If we project that mentality outside, we begin to see God in every living creature. If we begin to see the manifestation and form of God in every object, and there is no distinction between the God we see inside others and the unmanifest God, then that state is yoga, union.

Q. Please give us specific examples of how it is possible to be detached from our daily occupations, our emotional commitments, and our material and financial obligations.

Swamiji: There are no examples which I can give you. You can become your own example. Whatever examples I might give you, will be examples of other people and not

you, and you cannot be them. Whose example shall I give? Shall I give the example of Ramakrishna Paramahansa? He had the ability to eat human excrement with the same gusto as he would eat Greek halva!

Why do we look for examples when they do not relate to us? We have to realize where we are in our life, and understand that process of personal development. We can definitely derive inspiration from the lives of those who have undergone the process, but we cannot walk in their footsteps; we have to create our own path. In order to walk in their footsteps, we have to become that person. Your stride may be large, mine may be small; mine may be large, yours may be small. How can we match each print equally and uniformly? Therefore, begin to practise yoga, begin to practise meditation, and begin to observe yourself.

Become a drashta. This is the message of yoga. Drashta means seer, to be the observer of one's situations and actions, and where one is in life. Use wisdom as a tool to overcome insecurities and difficulties in life. Wisdom also has to come from within. You might have heard of the Mullah Nasiruddin. He was called to give a lecture once, but he had absolutely no interest in giving the lecture. However, it was a very important meeting, with many people expecting to hear some wisdom from him. So he forced himself to walk on to the stage, took the microphone and said, "Do you know what I am going to speak about today?" When everybody shook their head in the negative, the Mullah said, "Since you don't know what I am going to talk about, it is better I don't speak and get out." He left the stage. Some organizers were bright enough to trap the Mullah. They called him again and the Mullah asked the same question. This time the organizers had prompted everybody to nod their head and say yes. When everybody nodded their head and said yes, the Mullah said, "Since you know what I am going

to talk about I will go", and he left the stage. Then the organizers trapped him again. The Mullah again asked the same question, and this time the organizers had planned that half would say yes and half would say no. When the Mullah saw this movement to and fro, he said, "Those who know, please explain to those who don't know", and he walked off the stage.

This is a joke, but the idea conveyed is that in the application of knowledge, in order to deal with our life situations, we have to find our own choices. These choices are not following the directions given, for sometimes the directions given are not adjustable or compatible with our situations in life. Only those who can follow directions are able to let go of their ego associated with the intellect and action. However, we are not ready to let go of our

ego, which is associated with our understanding, our intelligence and our actions. Therefore, there has to be an adaptation of the guidance we receive and how we live our life. This is why the spiritual traditions of the past have always maintained that the search for the answer is within you. All intellectual interpretations can only indicate a process through which you can come to your own source of wisdom inside. However, the adjustment has to take place in your own behaviour and life, whether it is in relation to the family, finances, society, or your spiritual commitments. The vision has to be yours. The drive and the motivation should be based on the acceptance and realization of situations that you wish to change or alter. You need to have a focus and an aim for your life, before you try to find answers to such questions.



Q. Even in the most happy hours of my life I have painful thoughts and I start to cry. Of course it spoils everything. How can I get rid of this habit?

Swamiji: That is your problem. Why do you want to remember something painful, when you can experience happiness and joy? Just as you experience pain in moments

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them.*

of happiness, and become subject to that feeling, why do you not make an attempt to experience happiness in moments of pain? That is why I said it is your problem. Change your perception. When you are in pain, become happy. When you are suffering, try to connect with the source of joy inside, and then you will overcome suffering. Don't try to go from happiness to pain; rather, try to come from pain to happiness.

Q. What is the best way to help a person who is overly attached or dependent on us?

Swamiji: What is the best way to help a person who is overly attached or dependent on us, so that they can stop this dependency and feel free and independent? The short answer is people who are being depended upon, should

not feel the pressure of that dependency, nor reject that dependency. They should not isolate themselves from that person by saying, "I need to find my time and space because you are too demanding of me." They should not criticize the dependency of the other person. These four things are what they should not do. Now, for what they should do.

First, create an environment where the dependent person feels supported and guided. That environment is the outcome of your love and understanding of their situation. Second, ask them to find the source of strength within themselves. This can happen if the dependent person is requested to analyze the causes of their dependency. When the causes of dependency are known, and when you also recognize that these are the valid causes of the dependency, then pick up one cause and try to manage that cause. This can smooth the ruffled feathers. When that person recognizes that this was the cause of their ruffled feathers, then there is a way to work with it to smooth it over. Self-esteem and self-confidence are then developed. When this is achieved, pick up the second cause and work with that; then pick up the third cause and work with that. However, under no situation or circumstances reject the understanding or appreciation of the mental state of the dependent person. Dependency is always the manifestation of a crisis in someone's life, and the reason for that crisis lies in some other direction. It can also be an emotional dependency as strong and powerful as a drug or alcohol dependency. Also remember that you do not clap with one hand. It happens with two hands. It is not the dependent person who is at fault. It is you, who live near that person, who is also at fault, for it was you who started the crisis in the life of the other person which influenced the sensitivity of their mind. However, before you start helping the dependent one, help yourself.

Q. Is indifference an expression of a tamasic mind? What is its main cause? Is it the feeling that others do not recognize you? How can someone stop the negative thoughts and programs of the mind?

Swamiji: It is not possible to stop them. If we look at our own selves, and how we have associated with different things in our life, we will realize this to be true. It is never difficult to criticize others, but it is very difficult to appreciate others. It is never difficult to feel aggression and violence, but it is always difficult to feel a non-aggressive and a non-violent state. It is never difficult to express jealousy, hatred, anxiety and anger, but it is always difficult to express a balance in these things. It is never difficult to subject ourselves to the negative tendencies arising out of fear and insecurity, but it is very difficult to find a balance in expressing the positive tendencies in life. It is easy to become selfish, but it is difficult to become selfless. If this is the expression of our personality, is it good or bad? You decide. If this is the expression of our personality, is it positive and going in the right direction, or negative and restricting human creativity?

What is called tamasic, in yogic terminology, is stagnation in modern terminology. Water becomes stagnated when there is no scope for free flow. Air will become stagnated when there is no other source of air coming in or going out. In nature, in order to have purity, clarity and rotation, this is the law. However, if we apply that principle to ourselves, we feel threatened that we are going to lose our individuality, our basic precepts which hold us or ground us to reality. When other people say that it is okay to let go of things that you hold on to, you say that they are trying to take away your individuality. Nobody in the world, and least of all the spiritual masters, want to get stuck with the hang-ups of some other person's life. Would you be happy if your husband, wife

or children dumped all their negativity on you? When we can't accept negativity from one or two people, how do you expect the gurus or masters to handle the negativities of everyone the world? Don't they have bodies? Don't they have feelings? Don't they have minds?

The idea of self-preservation or self-identity is a contradictory idea. It is based on fears and insecurities, and not on transformative qualities and situations, which can enhance the beauty of life. Yogis have recognized that these conditionings of the mind are in three parts: tamasic, rajasic and sattwic. In the tamasic mind the idea of not letting go, and not willing to change, adjust or adapt to different situations, is powerful. In the rajasic state of mind the idea of control and personal manipulation is powerful. It can happen at a personal level, a family level, a communal level, or social level.

On the sattwic side, there is an acceptance of changes and transformations which can reduce the influence of the negative expressions, and increase the experience of the positive expressions in life. Yoga has said that there is no use trying to change the nature of which the mind is composed. Rather, understand the nature by becoming a witness to what is happening through observing the mind. Adjust and accommodate that nature so you do not restrict your expressions. In order to do this, there has to be a basic process of elimination and absorption. What you eat is absorbed by the body and then eliminated by the body. What you drink is absorbed by the body and eliminated by the body. Meditation provides the tool by which we can observe what is happening in our inner dimensions and eliminate the unnecessary ones.

Spiritual life

Q. Now that you are here we are okay, but when we are apart, our balance is threatened often and seriously.

How do you suggest we maintain our peace of mind and balance of personality?

Swamiji: This balance can be maintained if you love in the real sense. Love, love, love, love. Truth, brother, is your goal. Love one another, as I love you, for Satyam loves us all.

Q. I know that for the spirit, time and space don't exist, but how do you manage to follow the state of being of thousands and thousands of disciples all over the world?



Swamiji: The beauty of the tradition is that you don't try to follow the evolution of other people. A gardener plants many seeds in the garden, and creates the right environment for the seeds to sprout. How many seeds sprout and how many die is not the responsibility of the gardener. Rather, it depends on the quality of the seed. If

the environment is right and proper, and the guru attempts to provide such an environment, then some seeds do sprout and attain full maturity, while others shrivel up, dry and die. In spiritual life, nobody is responsible for another person. Becoming responsible for the life of another person is not the ideal attitude. Rather, inspiring other people to live their life happily and joyously is the ideal which spiritual people follow. It is your involvement and your understanding of yourself which allows you to grow or shrivel up. This is something we need to understand deeply, because if the gurus had to consider the life of every individual, they would go mad. You have to be responsible for your own direction in life. Somebody can only point out the way to you. The effort to go that way is yours. On the journey, if you stop at McDonald's, then it is your choice. The guide did his or her duty by pointing out the right way. The guide will not hold you by the hand and take you, for it will be a long and tedious journey for the guide also. This is where trust, faith and the ability to surrender oneself to the guru's will, play a major role.

Q. Please explain dakshina, and what is the meaning and purpose of it.

Swamiji: It is the age-old concept of give and take. I think this question has been asked in relationship to initiation, and the theory of giving dakshina at the time of initiation. Traditionally, when disciples would go to their gurus, they would offer three things. These three things symbolized the ego, life and prosperity. The ego was represented by a coconut; it is very hard and difficult to crack, and it was a symbolic gift of surrendering to the guru, or allowing the guru's energy to manifest in the life of the disciple. It was a symbolic act of surrendering to the divine will, and not allowing the ego to become a barrier. Once you crack the hard shell of the coconut, inside it is delicious; once you are able to crack the hard shell of your ego, the inside is pure.

The second symbolic gift representing life was water; the giving of water. Nowadays it is not necessary as we have Coca-Cola! We have so many other things. The third act was giving money in the form of gold, so that the work or the mission of the master could continue, without falling into shambles or decline due to a lack of financial support. Giving of wealth was symbolic of showing solidarity with the mission and the vision of the guru and the guru's tradition. These ideas still hold true at the time of initiation. You receive something which is unique in your life, so how do you show your appreciation? By giving a leaf, by giving a flower? A flower does not support the mission and the vision of the guru's tradition. A leaf does not support the vision or the mission of the guru's tradition. The gift that you offer should represent the will for continuity, and this continuity is of the work. This is the concept of dakshina. When you receive something auspicious, pious and beneficial in your life, something which has inspired you, then you contribute to the continuation of that mission.

Q. Swamiji, I have heard and read that you were born through the creative force of Swami Satyananda. If this is true, what does it mean?

Swamiji: It is true, but will you be able to understand and accept it? I don't think so. You may nod your head, but I totally and one hundred percent sincerely doubt that you will be able to understand it. Are you able to understand that Christ was born of a virgin mother? Or is it just a belief? If you think about it, what do you think? Is it possible? Has it happened, in any other place in history, if it is possible? Has it happened to anybody in the subsequent history of the world civilization and culture? There are some things which we just accept. There are some things which are guided by faith and not by the realities that surround us, and the answer is similar to that. Therefore, I can assure



you that you will not be able to understand it, and I should not even talk about it. Maybe, when we exist no more, then somebody can tell the real story, but this is not the time.

Well, away from the serious discussions! The final joke for tonight. There was a crack in the wall, which separated heaven and hell, due to the extreme temperatures. St. Peter called Lucifer and said, "Look, there is a crack in the wall, and this time you have to pay to repair the wall." Lucifer said, "What if I don't pay?" St. Peter said, "Well, you leave us no option but to sue you." Lucifer laughed and said, "Where are you going to get the lawyers?" I am sure that even God enjoys hearing some jokes from time to time!

Ashram life

Q. Please tell us how a person should live in the ashram. What really is ashram life?

Swamiji: The concept of an ashram, according to tradition, is a place where you can go to work on yourself. When Paramahamsaji went to his master, Swami Sivananda, and said, "I want to take sannyasa. I want to be initiated by you. What do I do?" Swami Sivananda said to him, "You work in the ashram." Paramahamsaji asked him, "What kind of work?" Swami Sivananda said, "Well, everything that is required, whether it is in the kitchen, the garden, the administration, or writing and publishing books. Whatever it is, you just involve yourself in work. When you have purified yourself, then I will give you initiation." Paramahamsaji said, "Thank you very much, then I am going home." Swami Sivananda said, "Why?" Paramahamsaji said, "You told me to work. I will do the work at home. I can work at home in the garden. I can work at home earning money. I can work at home in the kitchen. I can work at home writing and publishing books. Why do I need to be in the ashram? When I have

completed my work at home, I will come back, and then you can initiate me.”

Then Swami Sivananda explained to him saying, “No, work in the ashram, and not at home. When you work at home, you are working for self-gratification and personal satisfaction. When you work at home, you are working for yourself, for your satisfaction and security, and for social and financial reasons. You develop more bondages and links which will not allow you to become free later on, for at home one responsibility will follow the first one, and another will follow the next one. You will be so caught in your own creation that you will be unable to free yourself. However, when you work in an ashram, for whom do you work? Not for yourself, but for a bigger cause. The satisfaction which you derive is not self-oriented satisfaction. Rather, it is the satisfaction of having done the job properly, for the benefit and wellbeing of many.”



The home environment will develop selfish attitudes and self-centred perceptions. The ashram environment will develop selfless attitudes and universal perceptions. The selfless attitude is more relevant in the spiritual life than the selfish attitudes which are relevant in social and material life. The home becomes a place where you accumulate karmas, and the ashram is a place where you exhaust your karmas. So it is the attitude that we encounter in an ashram which is more important than the environment we can create in our own homes. The ashram is a place where we can learn to develop selfless attitudes, and learn how we can manage and adjust our own karmas, rather than accumulate more and more. Therefore, once in a while it is good to change your environment, your attitudes and your perception. It is important to experience the influence of an ashram atmosphere. An ashram atmosphere helps you develop immunity from samskaras and karmas. For spiritual development, for spiritual realization, and for knowing the reactive personality, an ashram is a better place than a home.

Q. Is it important in ashram life to give others recognition when they deserve it? Is it important in ashram life to apologize when it is required? How can one live and work with people who are not able to recognize the qualities of other people or who cannot apologize when required?

Swamiji: The ability to give recognition and the ability to be humble do not lie in the environment of an ashram, but in the environment which is within you and which is part of your nature. Your human nature should go with you wherever you are, whether you are in an ashram, in heaven, or hell. If you are able to express those qualities which are a part of your being, then you will be considered



a good human being. If you expect recognition or apology from any other person it is your expectation, and this you should deal with yourself. You can walk up to the person, grab them by the scuff of the neck and say, “Apologize!” Or you can simply let go of that expectation and not bother about it. The important thing is that you be a human being yourself, and not worry about others being animals or human beings. Let them evolve at their own pace and in their own way. If we are all able to express the human qualities that are within us, then the whole world will become a positive place where we can nurture, support and nourish each other.

Q. Could you please elaborate, both on the physical and spiritual levels, on the meaning of having one’s head shaved.

Swamiji: On a physical level there is a lot of financial saving: you don’t have to worry about soap, you don’t

have to worry about hairdressing, and you don't have to worry about combing it all the time! It also helps you become aware of your own frustrations within yourself. If you have no hair to pull when you are frustrated, then what do you do? In spiritual life, hair is a great source of attachment. Why do we care for hair? It is because we think it makes us beautiful and appreciated by others. It is attachment for attraction. This kind of beauty has no place in spiritual life. Rather, it is the inner beauty with which we are concerned. Hair also does not allow the vitality of the sun to filter through the skin and reach the brain. Therefore, from the three answers I have given you: on the physical side, on the scientific side, and on the spiritual side, you decide. Blessed are the bold! There are quite a few bold people here. It is very good.

Q. Yesterday we said that when the heart and mind are full, and when feelings are full, then in Greece we dance. I would like to ask Swamiji to join us in some Greek dancing.

Swamiji: I don't know Greek dancing, but I can dance with you, and with my aspirations and feelings for this place, for this country and for this culture. The place where I come from in India is Bihar and we have a lot of Greek ancestry there. That was the place where a lot of cross-cultural exchange took place between Greece and India. Even today, while walking on the streets in the rural villages of Bihar, you can see the Greek blood. This interaction started with the marriage of Helena, the daughter of the commander of Alexander's army. Eventually this interaction grew into a strong cultural and social bonding between the two nations.

I don't know if you know the story, but even the word 'therapy' comes from an association of Greeks and Indians. When skirmishes used to take place between the armies of Alexander and the Indian kings, many soldiers were



wounded on both sides and left on the battlefield to die. At such times, in the evening, Alexander and his people would see a frail old man going up to the wounded, giving them water, binding their wounds and trying to heal them with herbs and other things. One day, Alexander said, "Bring that old man to me." The soldiers brought the man to Alexander. Alexander asked, "What are you doing?" The old man said, "I am treating the wounded and the sick." Alexander said, "You know that we are strangers to your country, yet you are helping my soldiers as well as your own." The man said, "Yes, I know, but the profession to which I belong does not allow me to see you as the

invading army, but to see people of both nations as human beings who are sick and wounded and need healing." Alexander asked him, "What is your name?" The man replied, "My name is Theravan." Alexander said, "This name is Sanskrit to me! I'll give you a Greek name. I shall call you Therapous." Thus the word therapy, the process of healing, came into being due to this contact between the two nations.

There has been a big Greek influence in India and an equal Indian influence in Greece. Due to changes in the geo-physical and political environment, in the course of time the two countries drifted apart. However, the spirit which united these two nations once, is still vibrant and continues to unite the people. When I came to Greece I felt that spirit very deeply in myself. It was like coming to my second home. Although I have come back after a gap of twenty years, I wish to return to Greece soon in the near future. In the meantime, I wish to simply tell you one final thing: just let us all open our hearts, open our minds, and enjoy the beauty and growth that life can bring us. This is not only a hope or a wish, but it can be achieved when the cultures and people of the two countries unite in yoga. This new millennium brings a lot of hope for the development of relationships between the two cultures, which have both given the world philosophies and thoughts in relation to life and spirituality. A bridge has been built, and now it is for us to walk upon this bridge. It is with this sentiment that I shall leave this country tomorrow morning at five o'clock, but I hope to return by the end of the day. Not tomorrow, but at the end of the day.

There was once a saint in India who was a very simple man. He is today recognized as one of the poet-saints. Many people came to him for guidance and direction, and he would satisfactorily answer all the questions. One person said, "Well, I also have a question. Let me go and

ask him." He went to the gathering where this saint, Kabir, was sitting down with some of his people and discussing things. Timidly the man asked Kabir, "What shall I do in my life?" Kabir said to him, "Look, it is evening time. The sun is about to set. Go back to your home and don't worry." The man bowed before him, left the gathering and went to his home. Other people, who were sitting there, asked Kabir, "What kind of an answer was that? The man asked you what he should do in his life and you said, 'The sun is going to set, it is going to get dark, go home.'" Kabir said, "Why don't you go and find the man and ask him

what he understood." The people went and asked the man, "Did you get your answer out of Kabir?" He replied, "Yes. I understood what he told me. It is getting dark. I am getting old, and the sun is about to set. However, go home and rest in peace. Go back to the source and there you will find tranquillity." So I say that I will come back before the end of the day!

Thank you to the people of this ashram who have made this beautiful event possible. Thank you also to Swami Sivamurti who has been the inspiration and force behind this beautiful gathering.



Round table discussion on addiction

Q. In trying to overcome addiction, how does one start when the mind is dissipated and addicted to so many bad habits, not only to drugs? What are the first steps?

Swamiji: There is something else to understand. The patient's or sufferer's recognition that he is under the influence of an addiction, is one thing. The line of therapy that he follows, whether it is medication or yoga, is another. However, this recognition that one is suffering from an addiction and the process adopted to overcome the addiction, is not a complete approach. Rather, a different understanding of the mind has to be created and instilled in the sufferer with the help of the therapist.

The common form of treatment is to go to a therapist or yoga teacher and say, "Look, I have this problem. Can you help me?" They will give some medication or a set of practices to do, and that is the end of it. In both situations it is like saying, "If you have a headache, take an aspirin and see me tomorrow morning." There has to be an understanding of the functions of the mind. We have to provide a direction for that mind to express itself while it is undergoing therapy. That focus should be on the positive aspects of life, where you can express yourself artistically.

Therefore, along with therapy, if we can suggest the development of a hobby, whether painting, music or sculpture, it will provide more focus for personal expression. When you are fully involved and engrossed in the hobby, you will not feel the need to take any stimulants that can be addictive. Having a positive hobby also helps to manage desires of a self-destructive nature.

Q. When someone takes psychotropic substances, why does he no longer have the need for food or sleep?

Swamiji: What seems to stand out is that whenever you take any kind of drug there is a chemical change in the

body and brain. As Sannyasi Swaroopmurti was saying, it can go either way; sometimes it is hyper-stimulation and sometimes it is a slump. Research which takes a topographical image of the brain waves has shown that when someone is in a drug or alcohol induced stupor, the brain's activities are highly disturbed. As the effect of the drug begins to wear off, suddenly the person wakes up, comes out of the stupor and realizes that he has not relaxed or slept, and once again he is hyper. The chemical imbalances create a disturbance in the normal biorhythms of the body. This is the basic knowledge. This situation can be helped by learning to relax. Some people have used the practice of yoga nidra to rectify such chemical, physiological and cerebral imbalances. There is something that can be tried for a particular condition and situation.

Q. When someone is addicted but doesn't make any effort to free themselves from their dependency, how can we help them? Just by practising yoga, can something change?

Swamiji: There is another approach which is not scientifically substantiated, but which seems to help. Yoga has said that everybody has the power to project positive thoughts to help others, just as we have the power to project negative thoughts to destroy others. This is seen in the chanting of mantras and in the practice of prana vidya. If we look at an image or photograph of a person and chant the mantra with a total desire inside to help that person overcome certain problems, then the positive support we are extending and expressing does create some sort of psychological influence, and they begin to come out.

The practice of prana vidya, in which we awaken, channel and direct our vital force, mentions that if we project the right form of energy to a person over a distance of many, many miles, even hundreds and thousands of

miles, that energy can also help that person. This is not scientifically substantiated, but in the ashram at Munger we chant the Mahamrityunjaya mantra every weekend for those people who write and tell us they are suffering and need help. Before chanting the mantra we read out their names and problems. We have had reports from several individuals that they started feeling better on the day and at the time the mantra was being chanted. They did not know beforehand when the mantra would be chanted, but they tell us the exact date on which they felt better and it corresponds to the chanting of the mantra.

We should try to understand that not everything can be fitted into the compartment of logic, but there are some non-logical things that help transform and change us as well.

Q. If one fears losing a loved one and gets panicky about it, what should one do? How can one deal with it?

Swamiji: If it is not a problem-related fear, then see it from a different angle. When it is a natural or spontaneous attachment to oneself, and the fear is because of the loss of attachment, the approach and attitude have to be different. There is a continuous disparity or imbalance between the reality which surrounds us and the attachments and aspirations which we develop within us.

There are some realities in life which are universal. Birth is universal. Sickness is universal. Decay is universal. Death is a universal phenomenon. We know all this. Yet, the greatest surprise in life is that people do not wish to accept it. Knowing that death is imminent, people do not want to die, and try everything possible to remain alive and become immortal. Despite knowing that things come and go, we cling or latch on to them and do not allow them to go.

Many different answers can be given. There has to be an understanding of the aspirations and responses

to how we wish to direct our life. In problem-related situations, this attachment takes the form of compassion. In self-oriented situations, it is an attachment. The sense of insecurity and loss disturbs the human mind. Losing somebody we love affects our mind. Our inner clarity becomes even more clouded. How to avoid being panicky? Through meditation. Meditation has to become a process of acknowledging the reality. Meditation should also become a process of adaptation to one's attachments so that the loss, insecurity and fear do not create an obsessive, psychotic state of mind, but are understood in the right perspective.

Q. Our families often ask us if there is a way of overcoming addiction to yoga. How should we answer them?

Swamiji: There are two types of addiction, the positive, uplifting and the destructive, negative. Art is a positive addiction for artists, but if it becomes the cause of financial loss and disturbance in the family environment, then art can also become a destructive addiction. Science is an addiction, music is an addiction. The desire for happiness is an addiction. The desire to avoid suffering is an addiction.

What is an addiction? It is a condition of mind which propels your behaviour and actions. In the negative aspect it is bad; in the positive aspect it is creative. Even yoga can be a positive addiction for some and a negative addiction for others. If you are planning to rob somebody's house, you do not declare your intention beforehand. However, if you are planning to find some



Hari represents life and its fullness.

The richness and wholeness of life is the experience of that nourishing nature called “Hari” in Sanskrit. “Om” represents the transcendental nature. If our aspiration in life is to experience the Hari and to experience the Om—the fullness of life and the transcendental nature—then that (Tat) becomes the truth (Sat). This is the meaning of Hari Om Tat Sat.

jewels within by practising meditation, you declare your intention beforehand by saying, “Look, I am practising yoga and becoming a saint.” When we think that some thoughts or actions will increase our prestige, we start talking about it right from stage one. Paramahamsaji used to say that you don’t have to declare that you practise yoga. Make yoga a natural part of your life.

—Excerpts from satsangs given during Sannyasa Festival at Satyanandashram Hellas, including excerpts from the EYF’s roundtable discussion

The Playful One

I remember we were all waiting for Swami Niranjan's arrival in the ashram and we had formed two lines on either side leading up to the gate, thus creating a long pathway. When he arrived, he got out of the car and started walking among us, smiling at each and every one of us, as we were welcoming him. After passing all the people, when he reached the far end, he turned around in a playful mood and said "That was nice, shall we do it again?"

—Jignasu Swaragyanam

Impressions

A collage of memories

Swami Sivamurti .

So many people had waited such a long time to meet Swami Niranjanananda. Many in Greece and the neighbouring Balkan countries had waited for over twenty years to see their guru in person. They thought this was going to be realized last year, but then the conflict in the Balkans resulted in a postponement of his visit. This long wait only added to the magic of the event, which began as soon as Swamiji entered Greece and greeted us all with his joyful smile and laughter. It was the first moment in a time of enchantment for all whose lives he touched while he stayed with us.

Vedic and ancient Greek customs were combined in the candlelit driveway to welcome Swamiji into the ashram at Paiania. The Greek side of this welcome involved an offering of water and sweets. The water is to ensure that all will run smoothly, and the sweets that all will be sweet.

Swamiji did not stand on ceremony, but that same evening began what was to become his daily walks around the ashram grounds, to see first-hand what was going on with the last minute preparations, and immediately further inspired all those who had been working for many months for his visit, with his presence and uplifting humour.

The ashram was beautiful. It was ablaze with many spring flowers, which had magically blossomed early



to welcome Swamiji and all to Paiania. The grass was a vivid green, which is a great feat of accomplishment in such a dry land. The different tents were brightly decorated, or in the process of final decoration, and all the areas, where the programs were to be held, were receiving their final touches.

What is it I remember most after such a momentous time? There was Swamiji's laughter and his spirit of goodwill, which pervaded the ashram and inspired us all. His generosity of spirit on every level: physical, mental, emotional and spiritual. Everyone joined in the

karma yoga to ensure that each event went smoothly. It was a time of cooperation and team work that heralded the means of work and accomplishment for the future. It was a time when work became seva and was coloured by harmony, joy and unity.



Another special moment was when Swamiji met with the children. He was invited by them to their room for tea. They asked him many questions, many of which showed more depth than the questions asked by adults. They also played music for him and shared some jokes.

Another moment of magic for us all was the time of the initiations. The age-old mantras mixed with the

sweet smelling incense as many people dedicated their lives to sannyasa and the mission and tradition of the guru.

The mass with the Rev. Antoinette Schoenmaker was another uplifting moment full of beauty and

touched with glory. As a priest, Rev. Antoinette uses age-old rituals in a modern way to create a passage between heaven and earth, through which the divine grace descends and opens the hearts of all present.

Another highlight was the play Diogenes, Skiron and Procrustis, an ancient Greek sadhaka and two soldiers. Diogenes searched all his life, holding a

lighted lantern, for a real human being. It was reputed that he would only blow the lantern out when he had met a true human being. He found this opportunity upon meeting Swamiji and at last blew out his lantern. Diogenes also met Alexander the Great, who said if he wasn't Alexander he would like to be Diogenes, because of the calibre of the sadhaka's character. The two soldiers, Skiron and Procrustis, amused the audience with the test of using a bed to judge the height and width of those who waited to travel through the pass between Athens and Corinth. Only those of the correct size were allowed to pass. This play showed the need to allow the guru to shape us to the necessary size in order for us to develop higher awareness and move forward in spiritual life. This may necessitate a trim to our ego or, on the other hand, it may mean a boost to our self-confidence. All three stories illustrated aspects of spiritual life that are still pertinent today, and were presented to us theatricality with much humour.

A love and compassion emanates from Swamiji that reaches out to all. He has the ability to meet each individual on their level and assure them that they are special to him. Being with him, I saw this happen so many times, in so many ways, on so many occasions. During these days, when the heart overflowed and words were no longer of any use to express our feelings, there was nothing left to do, but follow the custom of this country and dance. So we danced and Swamiji also danced. Then he was crowned with an olive wreath, which in ancient Greece symbolized the crown of victory. The victory he won was the hearts of the Greek people.

Sannyasa tradition

Swami Sivamurti

Swami Niranjan is introducing yoga and sannyasa with slight variations, and for this reason he is calling his system classical yoga. This is a combination of the traditional and scientific yoga as taught by his predecessors.

During his official time as a guru, Paramahamsaji broke a lot of the traditional ways. He introduced people from the West into sannyasa, which was very much against protocol. He also encouraged more women and children into sannyasa. In his time he initiated thousands of people into poorna and karma sannyasa. He would give that initiation without the training. He gave the degree, before you actually did the thesis, with the understanding that you would do your thesis in the next twelve years. When he was questioned why he did this, he used to say, "If I see even a spark of quality or goodness in a person, and that spark is there in the moment they are in front of me, I consider it my duty to give them initiation, and to give them this chance in life. Even if one has a thousand faults, that one quality I want to try to bring to the surface."

It is a magnificent philosophy, but people being what they are, could not always reciprocate. Not everyone was able to honour his faith and trust, and take initiation and be true to their commitment. There were many around the world who misused the title of poorna or karma sannyasin. Such behaviour raised questions in people's minds, "What is there in sannyasa?"

Swami Niranjan, in his term as guru, chose a way to circumvent any further misuse of the sannyasa name

through introducing jignasu sannyasa as a trial period for sannyasa.

He established jignasu sannyasa as a stage before karma and poorna sannyasa. Jignasu means spiritual aspirant or seeker. It is one who is starting on the

existing everyday lifestyle. They should stay in an ashram occasionally, study and try to offer some service to society.

The jignasu wears yellow. Yellow represents the first stage in the awakening of the intuition. Karma



path, and who wants to test themselves on the path, to see if this spiritual tradition suits them or not. They try to live up to the code of conduct that is laid down for jignasus, and see if they can develop the attitude required for a jignasu sannyasin and also check if this lifestyle suits them. It is not a full-time commitment. Being a Jignasu sannyasin should complement their

sannyasins are asked to wear geru and are given the title 'Sannyasin'. Swami Niranjan is also planning to introduce other systems of sannyasa, and has already started by introducing rishi sannyasa. He has organized sannyasa to enable different types of people living different types of lifestyles to have the opportunity for a sannyasa lifestyle and benefit from it. Swami Niranjan

has given clear guidelines regarding sannyasa initiations that avoid feelings of guilt and confusion, for example, past situations when a person was initiated into poorna sannyasa and later decided to get married. In the new system it is first jignasu, then karma sannyasa, and when one is ready, willing and able: poorna sannyasa.

Impressions of Swamiji

Swami Agnidevi describes an incident that took place during Swami Niranjan's visit to Satyanan-dashram Hellas in 2000.

An old man was preparing to kneel and do pranam to Swami Niranjan and offer him some flowers. I saw Swamiji literally jumping up from his seat to stop the old man from kneeling down. He caressed him tenderly and accepted his offer.

Seva yoga in kutir

Swami Jnanamudrananda talks about her experience of seva yoga in the ashram during Swami Niranjan's visit in 2000.

I was first acquainted with Swami Niranjan through Swami Sivamurti's words of admiration, a long time before I actually met him during the Tyag Convention of 1993 in India. From all those words, I had created a picture of a man with a wonderful mind and morality, a man who was an absolutely devoted disciple and who inspired people to love and respect him regardless of his youthful age.

In 2000, Swami Niranjan would come to the ashram in Paiania for the first time and two years prior to his arrival, Swami Sivamurti started preparing for his visit

with utmost care, so that the seminars and everything else would be perfectly organized. The whole ashram was a big hive of activity in order to welcome our noble guest and all the hundreds of visitors from Europe, Greece and other parts of the world.

The days passed filled with work and often we had meetings with Swami Sivamurti until 2.30 and 4 in the morning, as that was the only time everybody could be present to report back on their area.



My duty was in the public relations area and also offering tea and refreshments to Swami Niranjan and his guests in between programs. Upon his arrival at the ashram I was to welcome him with Swami Sivamurti inside Anahat garden, where he was going to stay. The welcome was done partially in a typical Indian way offering light, tilak, flowers and garlands and partially in a typical Greek way offering cold water and sweet. At that moment I was inexplicably overcome by awkwardness, desperation, awe, fear, stress and

terror. I prayed for the earth to open up and swallow me. Finally, my torture finished when Swami Niranjan thanked us all with a sweet and big smile, like the shining of a thousand suns and went into his room.

I started preparing some Indian tea in the small kitchen, near his room and as I was doing that I turned around and saw him in front of me, standing upright, all dressed up, looking at me with such a sweetness and gentleness and asking kindly if there was someone to escort him around the ashram grounds. Again I froze, unable to speak, in a state of panic, fear, helplessness and awe. Then suddenly, at that moment, as if by a miracle, everything became quiet and peaceful inside me and my fear left me. I managed to take control of myself and offered to escort him. After that I took care of him during his stay in the ashram and it was a great blessing and honour for me to serve him during this short period. I will always remember with deep respect his wonderful and sweet, yet austere personality.

Preparations for Swami Niranjan's visit in 2000

Swami Vedavyasananda describes the events preceding the coming of Swami Niranjan in 2000.

Twice in its twenty-six year history the ashram in Paiania has undergone a major change. The first time was in 1985 when Swami Satyananda visited this ashram for the first time and officially inaugurated it. The second time was in 2000 with Swami Niranjan's first visit to the ashram and his second visit to the country, as he had previously visited Greece in 1979.

The preparations for Swami Niranjan's visit started in early 1998, as the dates of his visit had originally

been set for the 14th to 20th of June 1999. For those of us living in the ashram his visit meant a lot more than the organization of some large-scale programs. Now, thinking back, it also meant rebuilding the whole ashram. As soon as news of Swami Niranjan's coming was in the air, Swami Sivamurti and everyone else in the ashram started working like members of an ant colony, building and organizing.

Most of the ashram, little by little, turned into a construction site. Very soon the old roofs were replaced by new ones. The toilets, the sewage system and the landscape architecture of the garden were all under construction. The kitchen was re-built to cater for four hundred people, equipped with new ovens, new gas installations, new storerooms and a cooling chamber to store big quantities of vegetables. New accommodation was built and the old rooms were refurnished with brand new beds and linen. Soon there was hardly any place in the ashram that had not been dug up. Nothing seemed to be good enough for our beloved and special guest.

Everything was up in the air as far as resources and finances were concerned. It was as though a force had taken the ashram up in the air in a whirlwind and thrown it back down in its proper place. The ashram was preparing for its biggest event since its inauguration. Through the winter and autumn of 1998, and spring of 1999, we all lived an unforgettable year, with only one toilet and no heating and sewage installations. However, we managed to have everything in place just a month before the scheduled events. By that time we had over three hundred confirmed bookings with a large number of people staying in surrounding hotels.

The events scheduled to be hosted in the ashram were a joint organization between Satyanandashram Hellas and the European Yoga Fellowship (EYF). EYF organized a forum held in the ashram. This was a two day program on 'The Application of Yoga in Drug and Alcohol Rehabilitation'. Satyanandashram organized a set of three programs. The first was 'Sannyasa Festival', a five-day series of programs and festivities centred



around the ideals of sannyasa and the role of sannyasa in the 21st century. The second was 'A Celebration with the Guru', a day when everybody had the opportunity to come and receive guru's grace and darshan. The third was 'Yoga Day', a day full of introductory yoga programs and activities, especially for new people, again open to all. There were also two public lectures by Swami Niranjan, held in Athens, organized by the ashram, one on 'Give Yoga a Chance in Your Life' and the other on 'Discovering Human Potential through Yoga'.

So, together with all the construction and organizing going on, an intense communication and correspondence between the ashram and EYF was going back and forth, to ensure the programs were well coordinated and all details taken care of. However, at that time war broke out in neighbouring Yugoslavia and under these circumstances the timing for Swami Niranjan's programs was not considered auspicious. Thus it was decided that all programs were to be postponed until the time was right. This time finally came at the end of March 2000.

After two years of preparations, the day of his arrival came. The ashram looked entirely different, anew and beautiful in every corner. Swami Niranjan arrived in Greece on Thursday, 23 March 2000, around sunset. At dusk, just as the light was fading, he entered the ashram with the simplicity of someone who had always been with us. His appearance for us was the culmination of a process full of efforts, tension, anticipation, struggle, and finally, happiness. His presence brought warmth and light into our lives and the lives of many who were lucky enough to come into contact with him during the days that followed.

A picture paints a thousand words

Sannyasi Dikshananda's impression of the first day of the Sannyasa Festival.

Swami Niranjan was seated on a beautifully decorated stage. At some point he stood up decisively, walked down the steps of the stage, crossed most of the program area and entered the neighbouring building area. We all wondered what was going on. After a

couple of minutes he appeared again, holding a full-length picture of Swami Satyananda in his arms. Some people offered to help him but he wanted to carry it himself, as if carrying something very precious to him. He placed the picture on stage behind his seat.

At that moment, Swami Niranjan, an inspiring and bright guru, with such charisma and magnetism, turned into a disciple. He would not start the program without the presence of his guru, Swami Satyananda, and by doing so he showed us that Swami Satyananda is behind everything.

It was then that I realized his true greatness. Everything I had read in books until then about the guru-disciple relationship seemed so small in front of the living example I was experiencing. I automatically felt all

his humility, sincerity, faith, love, devotion and adoration weave itself into a beautiful shawl that wrapped around his guru. From then on, I understood that the calibre of a guru is measured according to how much he can remain a disciple of his guru, regardless of the height he reaches.

A Shakti welcome

Sannyasi Vedamurti describes Swami Niranjan's arrival at the airport.

In order to avoid any delay and inconvenience to Swamiji upon arrival, he was given a VIP welcome. A car was ready at the bottom of the airplane staircase to receive him and take him to the airport exit.

Swami Niranjan did not know of this arrangement and was surprised to see me there with an official

car, accompanied by two airport officials. We greeted each another and I explained what was happening and added, with a smile, "Swamiji, today you will be accompanied by the ladies!" And Swami Niranjan replied, "The pilot in the airplane was a woman, the official who signalled the plane to stop was a woman, these two ground officials are also women, Greece is a Woman, so Shakti is welcoming me!"

Welcomed by a policeman

Sannyasi Vedamurti describes another incident with Swami Niranjan at Athens airport.

After the VIP welcome, Swami Niranjan joined Swami Sivamurti in the car that would take him to the ashram. The airport security staff and policemen were guiding the different people who were being dropped off or picked up in the parking area, to avoid congestion.

I was with my wife, Durgashakti, in the car behind Swamiji's car, preparing to leave, when a policeman came up to us and asked with a face of restrained admiration, "Is he the teacher?" I answered, "Yes, would you like to greet him?" Somewhat surprised, the policeman answered, "Yes, could I?"

So, we approached the car where Swamiji was and knocked on the window. Swami Niranjan turned, saw me and the policeman and wound the window down. I explained that this man wanted to greet him, and Swami Niranjan, who had already fastened his seatbelt, unfastened it, opened the door and got out of the car! The policeman, in a mixture of English and Greek, said to Swami Niranjan, "Welcome to Greece, I hope you have a good stay in our country!" Holding the policeman's



hand, Swamiji thanked him and then got in the car again and we all left for the ashram.

It was as if the Greek authorities wanted to make amends for the unpleasant experience they put Swami Niranjan through, when he first arrived in 1979. This time they welcomed him with warmth and a smile.

Discourses in Athens

Sannyasins Vedamurti and Durgashakti give an account of Swami Niranjan's two lectures in Athens.

During his visit in 2000, Swami Niranjan gave two very important public lectures. The first one was held at Ziridi's private school, an established and highly regarded school in the greater Attiki area. Swami Niranjan was invited by Ms Katerina Ziridis, the owner of the school, to give a talk on yoga to teachers and parents. When Swami Niranjan visited the school, he first met with the owner and other members of the school, and then proceeded to give his lecture in the large school amphitheatre.

The second one was given at Goethe Institute in the centre of Athens with enormous success. The hall was filled to the brim, even the extra chairs were filled, and when there were no more extra chairs available, people just sat in the aisles and on the stairway of the amphitheatre. Swami Niranjan had a very good rapport with the audience, satisfying the intellectuals while simultaneously touching everybody's heart!

Golden opportunities

Sannyasins Vedamurti and Durgashakti describe the more relaxed moments with Swami Niranjan in the ashram grounds in 2000.

During those days, Swami Niranjan was staying in the ashram and you could bump into him anywhere, walking in the garden, outside the kitchen, sometimes sitting on a bench. Each time people discovered him somewhere in the ashram grounds, a circle of people would start gathering around him and he would talk and joke with us, or tease us. There was a wonderful ambience in the ashram and everybody was happy and smiling, even though they all had so many things to do.

Meeting with ashram residents

Sannyasins Vedamurti and Durgashakti tell us about the last night before Swami Niranjan's departure from the ashram.

The last night before Swamiji's departure was a difficult time. Eyes were filled with tears, smiles were frozen and the atmosphere was emotionally charged in dread of Swamiji's leaving the following morning. In the evening, after all the participants had left, the residents and some seva yogis gathered in a small room as a type of farewell. He gave us a different present each and then he told us: "My hands and legs are in Australia, my head is in India and now my heart is in Greece!"

Swami Niranjan's message to all

Sannyasi Sankalpananda speaks of a quality in Swami Niranjan that most impressed him.

Although Swamiji lived with Swami Satyananda from the age of four, he honoured Paramahamsaji at every opportunity, each time as if he had not seen him for years, giving us all a message on the true guru-disciple relationship.

Paramahamsaji on Swami Niranjan

Swami Niranjan has worked very hard. Generally, disciples want to see the guru in their self-created image. If this is the case, then the disciple becomes the guru and the guru becomes the disciple. But he never tried to see me in his image. He has always had the feeling, "Whatever you want me to do, I will do." I have always been a tough guru, but Swami Niranjan accepted me as I was. If you really want to find your guru, you have to accept him in his true form. Once you have decided, "This person is my guru", then you must accept him as he is. Try and mould yourself in his form, and do not mould him in your form.

Chronicles

During the first three months of 2000, the ashram was a hive of activity, as we prepared for Swami Niranjana's visit. Extensive publicity was undertaken. We mailed invitations and distributed leaflets to members and friends of Satyanandashram Hellas, Greece, and foreign educational institutions, health practitioners and medical centres, cultural communities and organizations, foreign embassies, a range of media outlets, including newspapers, magazines, alternative press, radio and TV.

Swami Niranjana's visit to Satyanandashram Hellas occurred during 23 March – 3 April 2000. Swami Anandananda (Italy), Swami Vedantananda (United Kingdom), and Swami Prakashananda (Germany) were also present.

Swami Niranjana conducted lectures and seminars at the European Yoga Fellowship (EYF) forum on yoga and addiction and also at the Sannyasa Festival (organized by Satyanandashram Hellas). Both programs were held at our ashram outside Paiania. He also delivered two public lectures in Athens.

The EYF forum brought researchers and experts together from all over Europe and other countries. They shared their knowledge on addiction, and proposed ways on how yoga could help people during the rehabilitation process. Swami Niranjana gave inspiring discourses on the breakthroughs of related projects at the Bihar School of Yoga. The program concluded with a roundtable discussion, which emphasized sannyasins' responsibilities and priorities towards the project of yoga and addiction for the next three or so years. Following this effort, the results of their research and discoveries were to be compiled into a book and published.



The Sannyasa Festival was a forum on modern and traditional sannyasa. Sannyasins from many countries discussed their interpretations of what it meant to be a sannyasin in today's world. On the last days of the festival, Swami Niranjana initiated 12 disciples into poorna sannyasa, 68 into karma sannyasa, 53 into jignasu sannyasa, and 60 into mantra and spiritual name. His final discourse focused on the role of yoga and sannyasa in the third millennium.

During his time in Greece, Swami Niranjana also had the opportunity to carry out various meetings with the members of Research of Yoga in Education (RYE) Greece, the International Yoga Fellowship Movement (IYFM), the European Yoga Fellowship Movement (EYFM), and other international Satyananda Yoga communities. He met the group of Athens Yoga Teachers, and had several meetings regarding the foundations for a Satyananda Yoga Academy in Europe. He had a morning tea with the children's group, and met with the ashram residents on a number of occasions.

Swami Niranjana left the ashram during the early morning of Monday 3 April. We shall all cherish the memory of his visit and keep the flame of his spirit burning in our hearts.

In 2001, Satyanandashram Hellas compiled the material from their programs with Swami Niranjana into a book, Sannyasa Festival. The EYF also published a book with the material from their forum on yoga and addiction in 2000. In response to Swami Niranjana's mandate, to continue with the application of yoga in the field of addiction, Satyanandashram Hellas initiated a pilot program for the management of drug and alcohol addiction: Overcoming Addiction Program (OAP) within the ashram environment. This program continued to 2005 and achieved very positive results.





2005

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Swami Niranjana arrived in Greece from Germany, where he had been after his trip to Colombia, and gave programmes to the members of the Satyananda Yoga community. He stayed at Satyanandashram Hellas for three days and conducted lectures, talks and satsangs.

Day-by-Day Itinerary

From 3–5 June 2005, Swami Niranjana's program: 'Yoga, Balance and Harmony' was held at Satyanandashram Hellas and was attended by over 650 participants. Swami Niranjana arrived in Greece from Germany, where he had been after his trip to Colombia, and gave programs to the members of the Satyananda Yoga community. He stayed at Satyanandashram Hellas for these three days and conducted lectures, talks and satsangs.

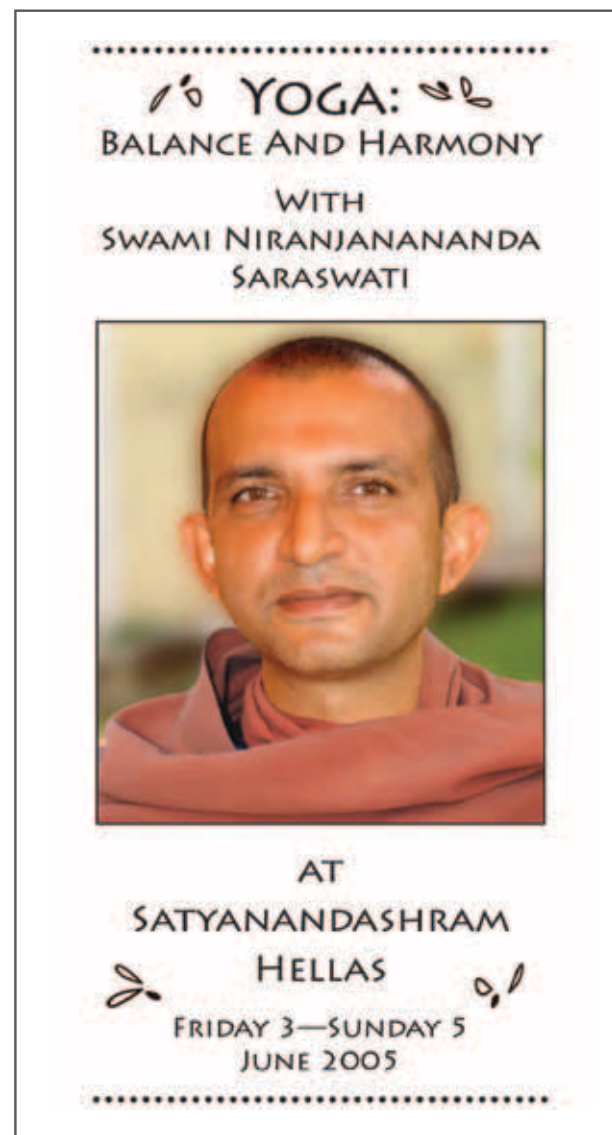
Friday, 3 June

Swami Sivamurti opened the three-day seminar by welcoming all the participants from seventeen countries and twenty-four cities of Greece. Apart from her presentation, the program included lively kirtans, a meditation practice, and a DVD of Swami Niranjana's recent trip to Colombia.

Saturday, 4 June

Swami Niranjana arrived in Greece early in the afternoon. He received a very warm welcome as he entered the ashram.

Swami Sivamurti welcomed Swami Niranjana to Satyanandashram Hellas and to the 'Yoga, Balance and Harmony' seminar. As part of the welcome festivities (which included a theme song, kirtans, and bhajans), a dramatic presentation was made, in which the ancient Greek god Olympus greeted and welcomed Swami Niranjana to Greece, and honoured his presence with us.



Cover of invitation leaflet, given Out prior to the Seminar

Swami Niranjana's discourse, 'Yoga, Balance and Harmony' was also given during the program.

During the day, chanting sessions, as well as lectures, workshops and practical sessions were held on various topics, such as 'Balance through Emotional Management' with Swami Shraddhananda and Swami Bhajanananda; 'Harmony between Head, Heart and Hands' with Swami Aparokshananda and Swami Vedavyasananda; and 'The



Balance of Life' with Swami Kevalyananda and Sannyasi Poornananda.

Swami Niranjana also had an informal meeting with the residents of the ashram on that day.

Sunday, 5 June

Early in the morning, Swami Niranjana conducted poojas and havan, and gave initiations as part of the 'Guru Day' program. Approximately 350 aspirants were initiated by

Swami Niranjana into mantra, jignasu, karma sannyasa and poorna sannyasa. Those not taking initiation were involved in making an anahata chakra mandala from various seeds in the garden.

The mid-morning program with Swami Niranjana started with various talks on ancient Greek philosophy by various sannyasins: 'Plato and the Upanishads' by Swami Shraddhananda; 'Guru and Disciple Relationship in Ancient Greece and its Parallels with the Vedic Tradition' by Sannyasi Karmabhakti; and 'The Pythagorean Tradition and Tantra' by Sannyasi Atmaja and Stefanos. Following these talks, Swami Niranjana provided his commentaries on the talks.

A satsang with Swami Niranjana was also part of the mid-morning program. He answered various questions on yoga in everyday life, yoga and mysticism, yoga and dreams, and yoga psychology.

The program closed with a play based on the Greek god Eros, various poems, and some Greek music and dances. Swami Niranjana participated in the dance, together with the other acharyas. Thus the three-day seminar came to a close.

Monday, 6 June

Swami Niranjana met informally with the teachers of Satyananda Yoga from various areas of Greece at the nearby island of Aegina. They ate lunch and danced together in a traditional Greek taverna by the sea.

In the evening, Swami Niranjana had another informal meeting with Father Vissarion, a priest from the Greek Orthodox Church, which was attended by those present at the ashram. During this meeting, Swami Niranjana gave a talk on 'Hari Om Tat Sat'. This informal program ended with ashram darshan, a walk through the various areas of the ashram, during which he gave prasada to all.



Swami Niranjan's arrival at Satyanandashram Hellas, 4 June 2005





Yoga, Balance and Harmony

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

We are meeting here in the spirit of yoga and in the spirit of love. If you did not feel love, and if you were not connected to yoga, you would not be here. It is that pure feeling, which I see in each one of you, that makes me humble.

We are also reminded today of the Greek heritage, culture and civilization, that has given light and wisdom to humanity in the past. It is a culture which has seen great human achievements, as well as great human tragedies. The Greek civilization is a culture that has experienced happiness, beauty and joy, as well as the power of being an empire. It has also experienced the sorrow and pain of isolation. It has been an example of human effort, which led to either tragedy or accomplishment. The Greek civilization has lived with the paradox of either adhering to the philosophies of the material world, or accepting the realities of the spiritual world. It is in this cultural environment that today we are focusing on something close to our hearts and aspirations: the philosophy and systems of yoga.

Since you have arrived in the ashram, I am sure you will have experienced the energy and the magic of this place. This is because yoga is practised here, and yoga is a systematic and scientific way of transformation which is more powerful than any magic. However, in order to experience this magic, and a transformation in your life, you need to immerse yourself completely and totally



in yoga. More than being a philosophy, or a system of thought or practices, yoga is a lifestyle. It is a vision of life that is lived. It is an aspiration of life that is achieved. It is an attitude of life which broadens our perception. It is a reality of life which makes us aware of a greater uniting force around us.

I am not talking about spiritual or religious dogma, but the possibilities of human achievement. Human beings have been given the necessary tools and instruments to attain the highest goals in life. The highest goal in life, according to all the world's spiritual traditions, is the ability to experience oneness with everything. Realizing





oneness is not a mystical or an abstract spiritual process, but a practical reality of life. The aspiration to achieve oneness with the consciousness around us necessitates great effort to overcome our human limitations. It goes without saying that one cannot achieve any change or transformation in life until there is an effort behind it. The culmination of the effort represents the process of maturity. Just as a child makes an effort to learn at school and university, and gain success through the maturity of intelligence, emotions, attitudes, ideas and beliefs, and competence in skills and abilities, in the same manner, the mind, body, and consciousness is put through a process

to enable us to transform the basic qualities of our lives. Yoga, as it has been experienced by many in the past and the present, represents a process of reconnection with the body, mind and spirit.

We exist in these bodies, but we are not connected to them. We use our mental faculties to believe that we govern and rule our minds, but in reality, we are the subjects of our own ambitions and greedy desires in life. We strive, with great effort, to experience our inner spiritual nature, but we are unable to come to terms with our own minds and mental expressions. Therefore, in order to find contentment, peace and happiness, our search for these qualities is outside of ourselves. However, the more we search on the outside, the more disturbed our lives become and the more disturbed our minds become. All of the world's spiritual traditions teach that in order to find your own stability, you have to look inside yourself.

If you can, try to imagine an old set of scales with a single iron bar, chains, two plates on which things can be placed, and a central needle. In order for the needle to be straight, the weight has to be balanced; there has to be an even weight placed on both of the plates. However, because of our inability to reconnect with ourselves internally, and our drive to experience happiness externally, one of the weights is always lower than the other one. One weight is always heavier on one side, and the other weight lighter on the other side. When this is the situation, the needle points to one side and is no longer pointing upright at the centre. Therefore, what do we do then to achieve balance? When we are unable to lift the weights and bring a balance, we twist the needle on the top, so it points to the centre. When you point the needle towards the centre through bending it, then you can guess what happens. You are still caught in the negative pull of the material world. Although our aspirations may become spiritual, we are



unable to experience the purity of the mental or inner state, as long as our mind remains subject to the gravities of the tamasic, negative and material nature.

In this situation, we strive to become good by suppressing our negative qualities. In the beginning this is possible, because our will and aspirations are stronger than the negative and tamasic contents of life. Our aspirations and motives are high, with a newness and freshness to them. However, when we do something for a long time we get bored, for our minds become conditioned to it. After such conditioning, the mind looks again for something new, fresh and exciting. Thus the effort to what we started or hoped to achieve, is now reduced and diminished,

and eventually disappears. As soon as the inspiration and motivations are lost, what was initially suppressed comes to the surface again in the garb of newness. We then begin to question whether we have wasted time in pursuing something internal, as we have not achieved it as quickly as we had hoped.

Yoga recognizes this problem and offers a solution. There is a very beautiful sutra in Patanjali's Yoga Sutras. It says that in order to become established in your effort, you need to cultivate three qualities. The first quality is the effort to do something for a long time without getting bored, and with focus, awareness and a connection to the motivations and inspiration which have guided you. This

first quality is, therefore, continuity. The second quality is regularity and effort. Regularity and effort mean that if you decide to do something, you do it. It becomes a habit, and a part of your life. It becomes something that is important for you in order to experience life fully. It is part of your strategy of survival.

We breathe continuously without effort. Our heart beats continuously without effort, and our senses work continuously without effort. All these are spontaneous and happen effortlessly. However, the things that you need to change and alter require an effort in the beginning. That effort has to become spontaneous. In order for your effort to become spontaneous, there has to be regularity. Not that you accelerate and break, accelerate and break. If you can, maintain one constant speed. In this way, you will go further. Thus, regularity is the second quality that the Yoga Sutras talk about, and regularity transforms effort into spontaneity.

The third quality is faith. Faith is having conviction, awareness, respect, and the knowledge that your effort is appropriate. The way that leads to the culmination of your effort is an important subject in yoga. Faith, respect, and understanding are necessary in yoga as, without them, there won't be sympathy or empathy with what you are trying to achieve; there won't be an appreciation of the experience. These three qualities together constitute sadhana in yoga. Regularity, continuity, faith and respect. If we adhere to these principles of yoga, then we shall see a new dimension of yoga emerge before us.

What are these new dimensions of yoga? They are very interesting. You begin to realize your nature, and the transformation that is taking place spontaneously and effortlessly, in your nature, as you practise yoga. Practice of yoga may begin with the practice of asanas and the cleansing techniques of hatha yoga in a classroom.

However, the lifestyle of yoga begins in a different way. I am not talking of yoga practices that are done physically or in a classroom environment in a yoga centre. I am talking of the principles that enable you to live yoga. I will talk about the classroom yoga in my satsangs, discourses, meetings and interactions with you, but the main thrust of our gathering is to live yoga and how we can achieve that. To live yoga requires regularity, continuity, faith and respect.

When you live yoga, you begin with the fine-tuning of the mind, which is the outward extension and external projection of the transcendental consciousness. The way to balance, harmonize and reorganize the mind, the external faculty of consciousness, begins with meditation. I am using the word 'meditation' to mean a process of rebalancing the mind from zero to one hundred. In the process of rebalancing the mind, you go through the effort of cultivating your awareness. After the cultivation of awareness, there is an effort to gain control over the function of the senses. After that, there is the withdrawal of the senses from the external objects to an internal experience or state. This process, of developing the awareness and then withdrawing the awareness, leads to the state of concentration. An effort is then made to extend the period of concentration which is, initially, fragmented. As your effort becomes one-pointed, as you are able to extend the span of concentration, and as that one-pointedness develops more, the inner dissipations stop. This entire range of experiences is known as meditation.

In order to achieve this experience of the meditative state, you have to begin by developing awareness. This development of awareness is not only in the outer sensorial and expressive mental field, but also in the personality. Control of the senses is not the ultimate



thing, nor the redirecting of the energies of the senses, but the ability to fine-tune the different traits of the personality. In its simplest form, yoga defines these traits as positive and negative. The positive are the virtues and the uplifting qualities, and the negative are the vices or the destructive ones. In order to cultivate awareness and live a yogic lifestyle, an attempt has to be made to discover the positive and the negative sides of your personality. This experience, of the positive and negative traits and expressions, needs to be analyzed objectively.

In the beginning, strive to identify only what your positive qualities or strengths are, and what your limitations or weaknesses are. Don't try to justify

any quality, state, behaviour or attitude. Negative is negative, and positive is positive. Black is black, and white is white. If you try to justify anything, you are only justifying the existence of the negative force in you and accepting it. The awareness of strengths and weaknesses is, in reality, the first step into the meditative process after perfecting or going through pratyahara and dharana. In the initial stages of pratyahara and dharana, through developing concentration, redirecting the senses and achieving awareness, one is guided to redirect the energy of the senses and the interactive mind. In analyzing and observing one's own nature, the qualities and limitations, strengths and weaknesses,

you are bringing out the inner nature into the conscious field. You are learning how to bring about a balance in your outer experiences and interactions, and your inner nature and personality.

Therefore, analyze the strengths and weaknesses, and make an effort to cultivate the strengths which transform the weaknesses. If there are traits of hatred in you, cultivate love, the opposite of hatred. Forget about hatred and make an effort to cultivate love. If there is

selfishness in you, try to become selfless. If there is animosity in you, try to cultivate friendship and focus on that. Remember, that instead of removing things from the heavier side of the scale, you can bring about a balance by making the lighter side heavy. If you focus on removing the negative side only and lighten that, your focus will be on the negative side all the time, and you will be ignoring the positive side. If you identify with the positive side, then there is no self-denial. Rather, there

is self-acceptance, and this leads to creativity in life, as you make an effort to transform a good quality into a better one.

Your effort, which normally in a limited and confined extroverted state of mind leads to tragedies, will now lead you to inner heroic achievements. In this way, you will be able to experience the yoga lifestyle, not just yoga practices. This will be the beginning of the transformation of your nature, personality and mind. Not the ability to meditate for three hours without moving the body and keeping the eyes closed. Those who do that are hypocrites. I believe that one moment of total identification and peace can become the internal moment of experience. That one moment of joy can become the eternal moment of joy. If you can accept the beauty of that experience growing in you, you are living yoga.

I will give you an example of love. When you love somebody one hundred percent, then you expect that much love in return as well. Don't we all? If I give love fifty percent, I expect love back fifty percent, and if I give love one hundred percent, I'll expect love back one hundred percent. That is our life: expecting and giving, expecting and giving. When expectations become too difficult to handle, they become big problems. When giving becomes one-sided, that also becomes a problem. When expectations are not fulfilled, there is a sense of being rejected. This is self-induced. Why can't we accept the beauty of love that grows in our heart regardless of that beauty coming back? We should appreciate that beauty and connection of love growing in our heart. If we can do this, we will become yogis. If we have expectations, we remain bhogis. The attitude, the awareness and the wisdom have to change. If we can change our attitude, perception, and vision towards ourselves, we will become different.



Theatre play, featuring the ancient Greek Gods of the Olympic Pantheon

I shall tell you a true story of a person who came to me a few years ago in Munger. He said to me, "I have been suffering from hypertension for the last two years. I don't know what to do about it. I have tried every kind of medication, but unfortunately nothing has helped me. I want to try yoga."

I have been taught by my guru, Swami Satyananda, that if there is a problem it does not exist without a cause. If you can stop identifying with the problem and discover the cause, you will also find the solution. I used the same principle on him. I asked him if he remembered the day, the reason, or the circumstances which brought about the high blood pressure. He said, "Yes. I remember the day when I started experiencing high blood pressure, dizziness and fainting."

I asked him, "Can you remember the events of that day?" He said he could. I asked him, "Before then, did you have a history of hypertension?" He said he didn't and he began to tell me his story. He told me he had retired about three years ago from his job, and for the first few months of his retirement, he was very happy relaxing at home. However, he gradually became a couch potato. He would sit on the couch in front of his TV watching movies and changing channels, or listening to the radio, or reading his newspaper and eating popcorn and drinking Coca-cola.

One day, his daughter-in-law became angry for some reason, and told him that he was just like a dog sleeping on the couch all day. From that moment, he started to feel dizzy and fell to the ground. It was a big shock to him that his daughter-in-law had spoken to him like that, and that was the beginning of his hypertension. The anxiety, frustration and anger, which he felt at those words, hurt him and caused him to lose his balance and get hypertension. Out of curiosity, I asked him, "When she called you a dog, what kind of a dog did you imagine yourself to be?" He replied,



"You know, Swamiji, it was a funny thing. I saw myself as a street dog that was scrawny and thin with one leg up, one ear down, and with fleas all over his body. He was hungry and desperate for company, shelter and food." I was quiet for some time, and then he said, "Swamiji will yoga help me? Will you give me a program that I can do to help overcome my hypertension?" I said, "Yes, yoga will definitely help you, but I suggest that more than practising

yoga, you focus on one thing. For five minutes, when you are sitting on the couch, close your eyes and see yourself as a beautiful dog. See yourself as a dog which lives in a nice house, with caring people around you. You have an air-conditioned room, a comfortable bed to sleep on, and good food to eat." He became angry and said, "Swamiji, you are making a joke of my pain and suffering." And he left the ashram in a huff.



Three months later, he suddenly appeared at the gate and wanted to see me. When I met him, he said, “Swamiji, my high blood pressure is now gone. It disappeared.” I asked him what had happened and he said, “I took your joke as my practice and sadhana.” I replied that I wasn’t joking, but was quite serious about it. I said to him, “You took it as a joke, because you were not expecting a swami to say that to you. But that was your therapy. You were seeing yourself as a sick mangy dog out on the street, and you were fighting against your own mind. If you could see yourself as a healthy, comfortable and happy dog, then your stress and high blood pressure would come down. By cultivating this change in the behaviour and attitude of your mind, you would develop enough wisdom to know that you are not a dog, you are a human being!”

It is the change in attitude that is needed. It is the retuning of our attitudes which helps us evolve, transform and achieve in life, not the practice of headstand and other complicated postures. They are important, I am not denying that. Do them with regularity and conviction. However, also focus on cultivating strengths, by readjusting and refocusing your mental perceptions. What are we looking for, in order to live a yogic life and experience the awareness that leads to balance and harmony? It is recognizing our strengths and weaknesses, and cultivating additional strengths. From my understanding of yoga, this is the beginning of the realization of yoga.

—Discourse at Satyanandashram Hellas,
4 June 2005

The SWAN principle

A yogic technique that can help us better integrate our personality and accept ourselves is the SWAN principle. This is a technique developed by Swami Niranjan. SWAN relates to the abbreviation of Swami Niranjan's name, SwaN, who is the creator of this technique. It is also an acronym for Strengths, Weaknesses, Ambitions and Needs. Swan is also the bird known to be able to separate milk from water. This symbolizes the qualities of discrimination and right understanding.

It is the expression of our strengths, weaknesses, ambitions or needs that defines our personality and makes us what we are today. SWAN is a path back to reinterpreting our personality and discovering and accepting ourselves.

—Swami Sivamurti





Meeting with Ashram Residents

Swami Niranananda Saraswati .

One of the sannyasins told Swami Niranjana that he lived in Thessaloniki. Swami Niranjana said that before coming to Paiania, he looked at the map of Greece to refresh his memory, and while in the air, kept asking the air stewardess which city they were flying over. He



said that he first heard that the plane had entered Greek airspace when flying over Thessaloniki, and it was not long after this that they landed.

One of the residents was from Egypt and Swami Niranjana said that he was there last year on a cultural trip, and that he travelled up the Nile, and it was incredible. He said that apart from seeing the ancient sites and the symbols of the pyramids, he was also interested in the old belief of Isis and Horus as Mary and Christ. The richness of symbols as a universal language, which nobody can explain, was very appealing to Swami Niranjana, and he said he planned to go there again to further explore and study the spiritual aspect of the Egyptian culture in more detail.

Q. How does it feel to be in the Greek ashram again?

Swamiji: Well, I'm very happy to be here. Of course, it was a conspiracy by Swami Sivamurti because, originally, when we were planning the trip, I told her, "Only the ashram residents, and a few people, so we can have some private time." Then I thought I should check, and we went to the website, and the news was all over the website! Nevertheless, it gives me immense pleasure to be here, and the ashram is looking so beautiful. It has grown a lot since I was last here, and it is your support and cooperation that has made this happen. I'm sure that everyone, who came from different parts of the country and Europe, is aware of the effort that all of you put into this event. So, on their behalf, and from my side, congratulations for a wonderful event and a beautiful place. We shall be seeing each other again very soon. I won't keep you from your duties, because I know what kind of responsibilities there are. So, we'll see each other later. Hari Om.

Q. Swami Niranjana addresses the aspirants preparing to take poorna sannyasa

Swamiji: Before you make this commitment, I would like you to see yourself twenty years from now and how you will be. I would prefer you don't take sannyasa based on emotion, but rather analyze how you wish your future to be, and what you will become in twenty years time. Maybe twenty is a long time. Let's say ten years. If you see yourself as a sannyasin then, if you feel comfortable, then most welcome. I am not going to commit anyone to sannyasa today or tomorrow. If you think it through tonight, and you decide to go ahead, then just appear at the time of initiation. If you don't see yourself as a sannyasin, able to follow that commitment of sannyasa ten years down the line, then don't come tomorrow. If you don't take sannyasa tomorrow, for you are not convinced within yourself, it is not a weakness from your side. Rather, I would take that as indication of strength, that you were able to analyze yourself and decide, "Okay, it is not the right time for me now." Project yourself ten years from now, analyze, and decide on your commitment and sincerity. Is it clear?

If you want to take sannyasa, appear at the time of initiation. If you don't want to, it doesn't matter. You will still be close to our hearts. Do not take it with an emotional attitude, for if you take it now with emotional involvement, sannyasa will fail after a time. This is what I wanted to tell you all. Okay? So you decide, and be there tomorrow or not. It is better to be clear about it from the beginning than worry a year from now, "I took initiation and if I leave now, will it be against the principle?" It is better to take time tonight to observe, to analyze, to connect with your own ideas, feelings and plans for the future, and then make a decision. Anything else?

I'll give you an example. When you rush headlong into a relationship, without analyzing anything, then the relationship falls apart after some time. That is one of

the reasons why there are so many broken homes and families in the world today. Everyone is infatuated by the external appearance, but in sannyasa, you have to find compatibility with your aspirations and directions in life. In certain ways, sannyasa is traditionally a social death. This means that you can't float two boats at the same time. If you want to experience sannyasa as it is, and as the tradition has spoken about it, then there has to be compatibility and clarity. If you feel that compatibility,



awareness or understanding is not there yet, then continue as a karma sannyasin. A time will come, later on, when you will have that inclination and motivation. Therefore, from my side, this is my only request: think before you jump. If you are ready to jump, be there at the time of initiation. Okay? All right. Hari Om.

—Satsang at Satyanandashram Hellas, 4 June 2005

Common Roots of India and Greece

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

Plato and the Upanishads

There is an interesting comparison between the philosophy of Plato and that conveyed in the Upanishads. In Plato's lifetime, the civilian mentality was not ready to accept the spiritual experiences, realities or concepts. Therefore, the thoughts of Plato are cryptic and contain a hidden meaning within them. However, the ideas conveyed in his teachings are the eternal truth. What is that eternal truth? And how does each of us experience it?

What is the test of cyanide? If you take cyanide you will die, therefore be unable to describe the test. The dead know the answer, but are unable to describe it. You can interpret that experience of the dead by reading the letter the dead person has written. Upon taking the cyanide she or he was only able to write one single letter, a single syllable S, which can mean sweet, sour, or salty, depending on each interpretation.

The Vedas were revelations of enlightened beings. The Upanishads are a product of much thought and analysis of the human nature and mind. Can you create the taste of the chocolate in your mouth, and retain that taste for a few minutes, a few hours, a few days, or a few weeks, without losing the taste of chocolate? You can imagine what the taste is like, but you won't any longer have the experience of its actual taste. In order to have the actual taste, and to live and experience that taste, you need to

put chocolate into your mouth. As you put chocolate into your mouth, you are putting in something foreign which is not natural. In order to create the chocolate, different things were put in various combinations, and taken through a process. When you eat it, the sweetness of the chocolate is a revelation. That revelation is preceded by an effort to collect the right ingredients and make the chocolate. The discovery of the right ingredients and the revelation is based on understanding, logic, ideas and knowledge.

The Vedas are revelations about the taste of chocolate, and the Upanishads represent the effort to collect different ingredients which culminate in the taste of chocolate. Many different thoughts have been conveyed in Upanishads. Some are monistic in nature and others are dualistic. There is a collection of Upanishads which is known as the Vedanta Upanishads. These contain the theory, philosophy and thought of super-consciousness. In this thought the main point is that although we are limited and contained in a body with the five senses, there





is the possibility of experiencing a higher reality. The human mind is like a container filled with water. I do not mean human consciousness, I mean the human mind. It is this mind, when it is made crystal clear, that reflects the sunlight, the image and warmth of the sun. It does not become the sun, but it can become filled with the luminosity of the sun. That is how the Vedanta Upanishads see each individual, as a receptacle filled with water. When the sun shines, thousands of suns are seen in thousands of receptacles, and thousands of receptacles are filled with the luminosity of the sun.

However, we are not able to experience the sun, as there is a huge black cloud over it and in front of it, which is known as maya or illusion. That black cloud is known as the impermanent or transitory nature. It is this cloud which has to go away before the sun can shine in our receptacle. With the removal of the cloud you can then see the sparkle of divinity. The way to remove this cloud is through self-awareness, self-analysis and self-effort, which lead to self-transcendence. This is the path of jnana yoga. Number one: be aware. Number two: know, analyze and assess the appropriateness. Number three: make the right effort to speak and act appropriately. If you do everything appropriately, then the mind becomes the vehicle to give you the experience of transcendence.

In order to practise jnana yoga, follow the principle that I mentioned yesterday. Begin with knowing your strengths and weaknesses. Focus on increasing the weight of the positive qualities so that the lighter side of your life becomes heavier. If that happens, then maybe you will be able to experience the Platonic mind.



The guru-disciple relationship in ancient Greece and its parallels with the vedic tradition

The tradition of the guru-disciple relationship is an ancient one. However, it is also the most misunderstood one. This is because we tend to think of the guru from our limited conditioning, mentality, perspective and needs. Whenever we enter into any relationship with the guru, it is to fulfil the expectations and needs that we have within us. That gives birth to further fears, insecurities, desires and expectations in life. One begins to think, "If I have a problem, what will happen if my guru gets angry with me, leaves me, or does not guide me?" This creates further fears, insecurities and complexes within the disciple. Due to this selfish relationship, several emotional, physical and social dependencies develop, which are anti-spiritual. It is for this reason that I say that the guru-disciple relationship, although being ancient, is misunderstood today. If we look within ourselves, we will understand that we are not even beginning to comprehend and grasp the meaning of this relationship in our lives.

The first quality that is needed to develop this intricate inner connection with the guru, is the ability to become empty. If you want to fill up a space with something, you have to empty that space first. A filled bottle will not contain any more water poured into it. You have to empty the container in order to fill it. It is no use saying that you will surrender. You have to know, realize and live this surrender.

The dearest thing to Krishna was his flute. When people asked him why he loved his flute so much, he gave a very simple answer. He said, "When the bamboo is empty and hollow, it can create melodies. I love the flute because it is empty inside, and I can create any melody that I choose." Similar is the prayer which says, "Make me an instrument of thy peace." An instrument cannot play itself; it is only the player who can create melodies through the instrument. Therefore, the first requirement of spiritual life, and of the guru-disciple relationship, is to make ourselves empty. Then guru becomes an inspiration. I have experienced that inspiration. My guru is experienced in me as a form of inspiration. Paramahamsaji also experiences his guru in the form of an inspiration. There is no dependence or attachment; there is reverence, faith, trust, love, and there is oneness. Therefore, being empty is the first requirement. The second requirement is to expand the horizons of wisdom by becoming aware, and the realization that nothing is final in this life. This is the beginning of spiritual education.

It is like the example of the Upanishads and the Vedas. The Upanishads represent a collection of thoughts. Some are absolute, some are divisive, some are monistic, and some are dualistic. The Vedas represent the final revelation of these concepts, and the transformation of these concepts into experience. However, at the end of the Vedas, it is said: Neti, neti, neti – "Not this, not this, not this." This phrase means that even the revelations are not absolute. They are the culmination points of an idea or a chain of thought. They are identified as one revelation, or one concept. However, what is continuous and permanent is the potentiality in our life of spirit or divinity. It is the cultivation of awareness which develops the human mind and allows transcendence of our external nature. These ideas were also conveyed by Socrates: being empty and

developing awareness. The guru-disciple relationship is a relationship that uplifts one spiritually to experience the luminosity within. The connection with the guru represents the continuous drive to achieve not perfection, but proficiency in life. The experience of proficiency in life indicates the continuity of spirit.

Although many traditions and beliefs do not accept reincarnation, the vedic philosophy and culture believes in reincarnation. Reincarnation is the spirit or consciousness becoming self-aware at different levels, stages of existence and evolution. Whenever the consciousness becomes self-aware, it is known as the reincarnation of consciousness, which has made it aware of itself. The seed reincarnates and evolves into another seed. Each reincarnation represents the continuity of the potential inherent in the seed. You eat a mango, and then you plant the mango seed. It grows into a tree, and produces fruit which contains many seeds. However, the first fruit which you ate died. The potentiality continued and manifested in the second, third and many other fruits. The same potential of the seed, which is now destroyed, is now contained in all the different fruits that are on the tree.

You can eat as many mangoes as you want, and again plant seeds which will have the same potentiality when they grow up. In the same way, the consciousness continues to evolve. A body dies and there is no return to that same body. The same body does not come back in the same space, time, situation, or circumstance. However, the potentiality of the spirit or consciousness continues to exist in different levels and dimensions. When the time is ripe, the same potentiality manifests again in a new body. Even if you die on this planet and go to heaven, you will still be an incarnated being in heaven. Even if you go to hell, you will be an incarnated being in hell. No matter where you go, you are in a different incarnation, in a different

life, and in a different experience which is continuously evolving. This is only a play, a lila, in the omnipotence of divinity. Each time you experience the same potentiality of the omnipotent.

The Pythagorean tradition and tantra

The teachings of Pythagoras have much in common with tantra. Myths, mysteries and initiations are the three components of the tantric meditation and the tantric way of life.

The Shaivite tradition, which is an offshoot of tantra, and whose followers worship Shiva, has the following myth. At a place called Arunachala, there is a mountain.

*God is beyond speech. God is beyond
mind. God who is formless. God
who is nameless. God who has no
particular place. God who has no
denomination. God who is as big
as the cosmos and smaller than the
atom. Such a funny God man has
discovered.*

One day, on top of that mountain, there was a fight between Brahma and Vishnu. Brahma is the creator and the cause of creation. Vishnu is the preserver and the one who sustains life. They argued over who was the greatest god. Is the creator the greatest or the sustainer? They quarrelled about it for a long while. While they were having this great dispute, suddenly between them appeared a pillar of fire, and it extended upwards to the heavens, and downwards to the underworld.



When this pillar appeared, both the gods wondered what it could be. They decided to investigate it. Vishnu took the form of a boar and dug underground to see the base of the fire pillar. Brahma took the form of a swan and flew upwards into the heavens to find the top end. They were flying and digging into infinity, as the fire pillar extended from infinity to infinity. Eventually, Brahma became tired of flying and flapping his wings and he decided to cheat. He picked up a flower from infinity and came back down. According to Hindu mythology, at that time Brahma had five heads representing the five attributes of nature, the five senses and the five elements. Without these five attributes, one cannot create or do anything. Therefore, the symbolic representation of the creator is a person with five heads.

As Brahma returned to earth with the flower, he looked down at the crater which Vishnu, as a boar, had descended into. He whistled to Vishnu and asked him to come back up. Vishnu ascended, panting and covered in muck from being a boar underground. Brahma said to Vishnu, "Look, I have found the other end of the fire pillar, and this is a flower from there to prove it." The moment Brahma told this lie there was a burst of thunder from the fire pillar, and a type of flame rose up and cut one of the heads of Brahma. According to the myth, the fire pillar said, "Both of you are wrong. Nobody can scale the extremes of the fire pillar, because I am the infinite. I am omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent, without a beginning and without an end. You can only find extremities when there is a beginning and when there is an end."

The message within this myth is to understand the teaching and the philosophy of the tale in your own life. Vishnu, who represents the force of existence, sustenance and preservation, takes the form of a boar and goes down into the earth. This is because what sustains and nourishes life is the element of earth. There are many things hidden inside the earth: minerals, jewels, gold, silver. There is beauty and also the muck, soil and lava. There are things that destroy and cause suffering, and other things that give pleasure. Both are there: suffering and pleasure; virtue and vice. Both exist. When you start digging, you find both things. Usually, the vices are in a greater

quantity than the virtues. Vishnu is the force of sustenance of our existence, and his energy is both negative and positive at the same time. You dig or search within yourself to discover the ugliness and the beauty. When you become the knower of both the ugliness and the beauty within you, then you are able to nourish your own life. Then you will understand the meaning of your existence, and not just have an ambitious expectation that leads you nowhere.

In contrast to Vishnu, Brahma, the creator, takes the form of a swan and flies into the heavens. The symbology is clear. The creator is bound to earth by the force of creation. At the same time, the possibility exists for the mind to ascend into unknown dimensions. This flight, into unknown dimensions, opens the door to spiritual and mystical experiences, and the realization of those transcendental states. However, when you fly higher and higher through your perceptions, knowledge and wisdom, there is also the growth of a weed. That weed is known as arrogance. In my opinion, ninety-nine percent of all spiritual aspirants are more arrogant than humble. This is because the spiritual attainments feed the ego, self-satisfaction and self-image, and it is that arrogant head of the ego that eventually has to be chopped off like the head of Brahma.

Therefore, innocence is considered the quality which allows you entry into the higher dimensions. In order to enter the kingdom of heaven, you need to be innocent like a child. The more arrogant you are, the more sadhana you have to do to become humble, innocent and to allow your head to be cut off. You can be one hundred percent sure that if you do not allow the guru to chop off your head, then destiny will. If you do not allow destiny to chop off your head, then God definitely will. Thus, this is the understanding of the mystery and teachings of this myth. When you understand this mystery, the process outlined during the initiation becomes your sadhana, and the method through which you can realize the myth within you. Then the myth becomes a living reality, and you become enlightened. This is essence of tantric meditation, tantric mythology, tantric mysteries and tantric initiation.

—Commentaries delivered by Swami Niranjan after talks on ancient Greek philosophy by various sannyasins



Satsang

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati



Yoga and mysticism

Q. In the video from Colombia you talked about the difference between yoga and mysticism. As I understand, samadhi corresponds to the mystical tradition we have in Europe. I refer to the Christian tradition and not to New Age mysticism. However, as I understand samadhi to be an aim of advanced yogis, I do not understand the difference. Can you please clarify this?

Swamiji: It is essential to know the difference between the process of yoga and the mystical experiences we can have after perfecting certain states of yoga. I find that people are more obsessed with mystical experiences than with trying to improve the quality of their lives. I don't agree with that.

Let me try to give you an example with the room we are in and the boundaries that surround it. If you want

to leave those boundaries, you have to start walking from the point where you are and move towards the boundaries. If I ask you to stand up and walk towards the door, and tell you that you can walk there any way you choose, then the choice of the route you take is yours. You can walk from any spot in the room to its boundaries. While you are walking there, you can observe where you are, where you are putting your feet, and be careful not to trip over people, their bags and other obstacles that may be in the way. If you go through the door you will see an open and clear space. This journey from your seat to the door represents the process, effort and sadhana of yoga. You have to tread carefully, overcome obstacles, observe yourself and other people, and be aware of the influences and situations you experience while striving to maintain your balance. When you go through the door, you are free to live your life without any restriction. However, while you are undertaking the journey to the door, you have to

tread carefully because of the other people in the room.

Think about this process. If, from the beginning, you start thinking and projecting yourself outside the door, you will stumble and have accidents. You will hurt yourself and may fall and break a bone, or twist your ankle. Anything can happen. Therefore, the main concern is not to think about mystical experiences, which lie outside the boundaries of where we live, but how to develop awareness, so that we can move in this crowded room, which represents our crowded minds that are full of conditionings, desires, ambitions, and personal eccentricities. The first direction of yoga is to manage yourself, manage your mind, feelings, emotions and instincts, and give them direction and focus. The outcome or result of that will be your journey into the unknown, the mystical, the spiritual.

One of the biggest problems with the mind is that we project and see ourselves as we wish to be in the future. We ignore the present moment and what we are currently



experiencing. Yoga teaches us to connect with the present without expectations of the future. The future is the outcome of a balanced, harmonious and joyous present. Even samadhi is not a process of mystical experience, but a process of gaining knowledge, control and direction over the faculties of the mind. The word samadhi means a balanced, harmonious and integrated intelligence. Not intellect, but intelligence. It means establishing yourself in wisdom and identifying with that universal intelligence. Samadhi is a sadhana or practice you are trying to aspire to or attain. It is dealing with yourself, and trying to achieve a balanced and harmonious consciousness. After you have achieved this internal balance and harmony, then mystical experiences can and do happen.

You can describe the glory of the beauty and nature of the sun to a blind man, and the blind man can create visual impressions, images or fantasies of it. However, his images and fantasies can never be accurate. For an accurate experience, he needs to be able to see with his eyes. If you describe what the sun is like, what it radiates, and its colour, a blind man can recreate it only according to his thoughts, ideas, conditionings and mentality. We are like this blind person who thinks such images are the truth; we think we are having mystical experiences, when we are not living in the present, and are unable to walk consciously from the place where we are now to the boundaries of our life. Yoga says that initially you need to make an effort, and practise a system of techniques through which you can become aware of the present, and learn to manage the present environment, situations, events, and circumstances. In this way, you gain control over your actions and reactions.

You cannot quench your thirst by just thinking about a cool drink. The first step towards samadhi is an effort to attain a balanced and integrated intelligence in life. The



second step is the extension and culmination of that effort, when you actually experience the unknown, the mystical and the spiritual. These two steps need to be understood in life. The first step is overcoming your own limitations and moving towards your limits. That is the process of yogic sadhana, yogic effort and yoga practice. When you are able to overcome your limitations, and move into the unidentified and inaccessible areas of existence, then

what you experience is identified and labelled as mystical. However, they are real happenings and events that alter and transform your life.

From this viewpoint, you can see that yoga sadhana and yoga life are two different things. Yoga sadhana or practice allows you to move into the experiences of life and to recognize them and realize them. Yoga life allows you the access to and the ability to interact with the

unknown and inaccessible areas of your existence. The sadhana is a yoga practice to attain different states of consciousness. Mystical experiences occur in a yoga life. Again, I emphasize that yoga life is experienced when you are able to fine-tune your own nature. When you are able to be a witness to your different mental expressions, when you are able to discriminate between your ambitions and needs, and when you are able to connect with the positive in yourself. Then yoga life begins.

Yoga and everyday life

Q. I travel for work across many time zones. Could you please suggest any practices that could help speed-up my recovery from jetlag?

Swamiji: These days, various airlines provide guidelines on how to manage jetlag. On my recent trips I flew with Lufthansa and they include the practices of pawanmuktasana one in their tips on how to deal with jetlag. These are very beneficial exercises that you can do sitting in your economy or business class seat. In first class, you can do many more things than in economy and business. When you do the pawanmuktasana one exercises, you are actually activating and stimulating the different nerves and nadis. The activation of the nadis will help to harmonize the pranas, remove the blocks from your posture, and also allow a free flow of vital energy. There is a sensation of lightness and increased energy when you practise pawanmuktasana after feeling stiff.

Yoga breathing is another thing that I found has helped me a lot with jetlag. Breathing is one of the most important functions of the human body and yet we do not know how to breathe correctly. Usually, as we breathe, our breath comes in for two seconds and then instantly out for two seconds or so. The general theory of breathing is that if you breathe in for one second, you breathe out



for one or two seconds. That ratio keeps on increasing. If you normally make the attempt to breathe in for five seconds, you will breathe out for six, and so on. The expiration is always longer by a second.

If you are able to inhale deeply, you fill the air pockets in the lungs with more air. I will give you an example: when you breathe in for one and a half to two seconds, in and out, if you take the volume of air in the lungs to be hundred percent in this form of breathing, then the air which actually goes into the air pockets or the alveoli, is only about ten to fifteen percent. It is in the alveoli or airbags that the oxygen is separated from the air and mixed with the blood. Therefore, what you are consuming is only ten percent of the oxygen of the total volume of air that you breathed in. There is a deprivation of oxygen in the cells of body. However, if we are able to raise the

level of oxygen in our cells, and increase the intake and absorption of oxygen into our blood system, it is easier to manage jetlag.

Research has shown that with pranayama or breathing techniques, one does not increase the intake of oxygen, and the level of oxygen in the blood remains the same as in normal breathing or even after the practice of pranayamas. However, the assimilation and absorption of oxygen during pranayama is more than in normal breathing. In normal breathing we are using only ten percent of the air that we breathe in and we separate the oxygen from that. In slow and deep yogic breathing, we are filling up more of the lower area of our lungs with air, and holding it there for a longer time before exhalation. The absorption of the oxygen happens in a smoother and easier manner without a lot of strain and effort from the body.



Research has also shown that the output of the carbon dioxide and toxins from the body doubles when you practise pranayama. If, for example, the normal intake of oxygen per breath is three milligrams in a normal situation, then even with a pranayama practice of deep, slow and regulated breathing, the intake will still be three milligrams. However, there will be less effort by the body to assimilate, absorb and use that oxygen. If the output of carbon per breath in normal breathing is two point four milligrams, then with pranayama, it will become four point eight or five milligrams. Pranayama eliminates the gases and toxins of the body more than increasing the intake of oxygen. The increase of vitality, and the increase of blood oxygen levels, will help manage jetlag better.

Thus, to help manage jetlag, I suggest pawanmuktasana one and nadi shodhana pranayama with deep abdominal yogic breathing.

Yoga and dreams

Q. In dreams we don't have access to our senses. I am working with dreams and find it interesting that different cultures, such as that of ancient Greece and Buddhism, have similar views on dreams and their interpretation. Is

there a correspondence in yoga, or does yoga conform to the Buddhist saying, "Holy men don't dream"?

Swamiji: First of all I want to clarify that yoga and Buddhism are not two different things. Buddhism is the outcome of the yogic experience that Buddha had. Prior to him being enlightened, and moving past his own boundaries, Buddha practised yoga pratyahara, dharana and dhyana. It was his disciples who gave the name 'Buddhism' to the process that Buddha had perfected during the course of his yoga sadhana. If I start calling Satyananda Yoga 'Satyanandaism', then maybe after one thousand years, people might say that Satyanandaism and yoga are two different things, for Swami Satyananda talks about this and yoga talks about that. If so, we would have forgotten how Paramahansa's experiences eventuated and which processes he followed. We would follow only the theory and not the experience of the original creator. Therefore, yoga does not conform to any Buddhist saying, but Buddhist sayings conform to yogic principles. What you

have claimed here as a Buddhist saying, "Holy men don't dream", is not a Buddhist saying at all. It may be written in a book by some Buddhist monk. However, it is a yogic principle and it is true. Holy men don't dream.

This can be understood from two perspectives: a holy person is a human being with holes, and normal people are without holes! When a person or container without holes is filled, that is what the person experiences. However, in a container with holes, as in the case of holy people, nothing remains inside the container; everything flows out so there is nothing to see. Therefore, yogis or holy people do not dream. Only normal people dream.

What do yogis or holy people feel or see then? Instead of dreams, they have visions. Instead of dreams, they have revelations. Instead of dreams, they are able to foretell future events. This is the opposite to the usual way of dreaming. We do not have visions, we are not able to foretell the future, and we are not able to connect with the transcendental reality.



Disciplines in the Ashram

In ashram life, Swami Niranjan has given us all a personal discipline of learning how to act rather than react. When we become aware and observe ourselves during the day's activities, we find that most of the time our behaviour is prompted by something that makes us react. Very seldom do we actually act.

In addition to this, the ashram discipline he encourages, shows us how to be positive, optimistic, creative and spiritual in all situations in life.

—Swami Sivamurti

For a normal person there are many different types of dreams. One type of dream is related to the activity of the day and the impressions created in the mind. If you have enjoyed being here, you may dream and recreate that enjoyment and see yourself being here in this environment. The recreation of sensorial pleasure is one form of dreaming. There are people who experience passion in dreams. Others experience love in dreams. There are also nightmares and wet dreams where men release semen. All these types of dreams recreate sensorial experiences, and belong to one category of dreams.

Another type of dream creates or animates your desires and expectations. A third kind accesses the deeper realms of your conscious, subconscious and unconscious mind. A fourth type of dream gives glimpses of areas

where the mind is connected to the past, the present and the future, and understanding those glimpses. Another form of dream is a projection of your destiny into the conscious mind.

Dreams are nothing but an expression of the mental behaviour or state which is prominent at a particular moment. They can be interpreted. However, there are times when they should not be interpreted, for there are certain things which belong to the realm of destiny and the unknown dimension. There is a balance of fifty-fifty. You have a right to know fifty percent of that which is conscious, and you don't have the right to know that fifty percent which belongs to the realm of destiny and karma. That which belongs to your destiny and karma is never interpreted and cannot be identified. However, if you have the ability and the wisdom to know what your destiny and karma is, then definitely you can understand those dreams.

I myself was involved in a dream research project when I was in the United States. I noticed that all the experiences of dreams recorded in this university, where we investigated a number of students, were mainly related to their sensorial experiences and their psychological states of insecurity, fear, passion, desire, aggression and anxiety. I realized what the tradition has said about dreams. In the Kena Upanishad and Prashna Upanishad, this subject has been dealt with extensively.

The Prashna Upanishad deals with various questions and includes a question about dreams. There is a subtle awareness within the inner mind, just as there is an awareness in the waking state when you are aware of the environment through your senses and mind. The interaction of the senses and the mind give you the experience of awareness in the same way as in sleep. When the mind is cut off from the sensory perceptions,

a subtler awareness manifests which helps to calm the agitations of the mind, and the release of those agitations are seen as dreams. Dreams are like geysers that suddenly rise up when the pressure builds. When the pressure goes away, the water again becomes peaceful and quiet. If you want to dream, dream of what you can become, and not what you fantasize you can become. When I was a child I used to dream that I could fly around the world like Superman. That was a fantasy. Now I realize that my dream is to be able to stand on my own two feet and not fly like Superman. The dream has changed. Previously there was a dream to be Superman, now there is a dream to be only a man.

Current approach to yoga worldwide

Q. You travel around the world a lot to spread the message of Satyananda Yoga. How do people respond to yoga today? What expectations do people have from yoga? How do you foresee the future of yoga teaching?

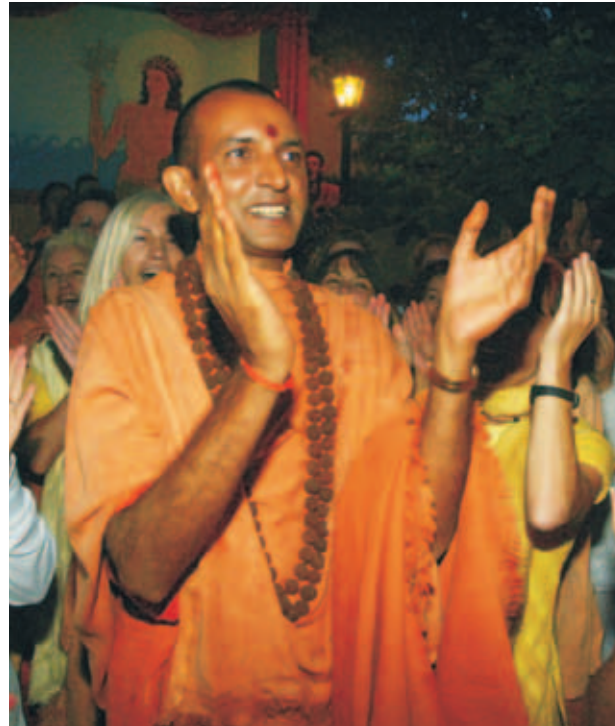




Swamiji: People who come to yoga don't come only because they have a connection with us, or they like us, but also because there is a deep inner desire to know something different, to be something different, and to overcome something in life. I will give you three examples of this.

During Easter I was in Australia for a seminar on yoga and Vedanta. There were about seven hundred people in the ashram. The seminar's focus was on how to realize unity within. Afterwards a lecture on Satyananda Yoga was held in Sydney which was attended by nearly four thousand people.

In Colombia, we were at the national university which is one of that country's most dangerous locations. Nearly



every day bombs go off there. Even before my lecture, there was a bomb placed in front of the auditorium. The organizers were apprehensive. They thought that even if fifty people attended the lecture it would be a considerable achievement. There was also the possibility that some would come not to listen but to heckle the program. However, one thousand people came for a three-hour program and you could hear a pin drop. During the ten days in Colombia, we spoke to over three thousand people.

In Greece, at this gathering, there are people from many different parts of Europe. Why? Why do so many pay out so much in travel and other costs to attend this seminar? What does this indicate? It shows that there is a

connection, a drive and a desire to know and experience something more in life. There is a re-emergence of the yogic energy globally. I continually witness this and I am convinced in my mind and heart that today's interest in yoga is not just for the practices, but for a different lifestyle. As people experiment with this lifestyle and go deeper into it, they find a better balance in life, they find more clarity in their minds, and an inspiration in their hearts to live, love and laugh more abundantly. When Paramahamsaji started his yogic mission, he had, as his goal, the propagation and assimilation of yoga with the scientific understanding of the modern world. However, as part of the second generation, my job is not to propagate yoga in the same way, but to take yoga to another level where it can be experimented with in life. There have been many opportunities to do this in India as well as in other countries around the world.

In Colombia, I had a talk with the First Lady, and she is very keen to have yoga taught in the Colombian army. We are going to start that project there. I am keen to see





yoga as part of the army training, because the soldiers will be exposed to yoga during their service and then, when they leave the army, they can take it back to their family and friends. The principles and practices of yoga that they have lived as part of their army discipline, will continue in their lives after their service is ended.

The next development, in the system of Satyananda Yoga, is to make it applicable to the social environment. In this way, yoga can become a part of a person's life; it is teaching something they will always have with them. Yoga is also beneficial for young people who have their whole life before them. It is this integration of yoga with society which, over the last twenty-two years, has been my aim and that of the Bihar Yoga Bharati. This is the current goal of Satyananda Yoga.

Another interesting thing happened in Colombia. There was an encounter of two cultures: the ancient Mayan culture of South America and the Himalayan culture of the Vedas. The highest Mayan representative from Guatemala came to Colombia while we were there. Both of us performed our own fire ceremonies to heal

the earth and society. He performed an ancient solar fire ceremony of the Mayans for the healing of the planet and its people. We performed our havan ritual, also for the healing and wisdom of people and the planet. The day we performed this ceremony happened to be the day of Buddha Poornima, which is the day Buddha attained enlightenment. It was a beautiful sight, to see the coming together of these two ancient cultures, united in their effort to bring healing and peace to humanity.

A few days ago, I was in Germany. People from all different parts of Germany came by train for a satsang and initiation into mantra and jignasu, and we discussed the ways of bringing Satyananda Yoga into the business and corporate world. Certain plans and projects are already underway, and in a few years we shall see the outcome of this endeavour. Again, I see this as an opportunity to bring

yoga to people in a way that is suitable for their present circumstances. When they retire from their corporations, they will bring the teachings of yoga back to their homes, families and communities. Each of them will have had the experience of increased efficiency, awareness, clarity of mind and willpower. Yoga will eventually enable them to see their work in the community as an act of seva, as well as deepen their commitment to develop their own wellbeing and lifestyle. In this way, yoga is also changing other areas of contemporary society. It is no longer understood just as a spiritual practice.

This assimilation is not something that any yoga teacher can do. The majority of today's yoga teachers, even those here, have no role to play in bringing yoga to this level of experience until and unless they can immerse themselves totally in the yogic experience itself, and



are motivated by feelings of empathy and sympathy for humanity. To achieve this ability, there has to be further training and development in a teacher's own sadhana, understanding and experience. The ability to practise meditation for three hours or do a headstand for half an hour is not enough. Being initiated into any form of sannyasa or any form of initiation, does not give anyone the right to become a teacher. Therefore, don't think that just because you have been initiated, you have been elevated, and can now become a prophet with an eye on profit. For that, you need to become a practitioner of yoga who experiences the variety and depth of yoga, and a teacher who is determined to maintain the purity and sanctity of the teachings of Swami Satyananda and Swami Sivananda. These teachers have to follow a path of self-discipline, because yoga is anushasana, discipline. This discipline leads to the attainment of sanyam, or the ability to redirect the forces of body and mind.

Last year, in Mallorca, we commenced the establishment of a Satyananda Yoga Academy in Europe. I told you that the baby was born, but that you had to leave it alone, in peace and quiet for a time, to allow it to mature. The Satyananda Yoga Academy Europe, as a baby, is wobbling but taking its first steps. The first step is the inauguration of the Yogic Studies course after Guru Poornima. This course is for three years. Two years are for yogic theory and practice in all areas applicable to the development of the human personality. The third year is the component for teacher training. Thus, before you even become a basic teacher of Satyananda Yoga, you now have to have completed three years of Yogic Studies.

The Yogic Studies course is actually the way to become a highly competent yoga teacher with experience. It paves the way for that. In the future, with the formation of the academy, a clear direction will be provided to yogic



activities and experiences as they should be, and not how we desire them for our own gains. Therefore, you have an opportunity to connect with this yogic teaching and raise your level of yoga awareness to another dimension. If you want to know more about this, you can contact the Satyananda Yoga Academy Europe. For me, this education represents the next step in yoga.

This is what is happening in the world of yoga and the direction which we are taking. Next year our meeting will be in Venice with a special program of kirtans and

God is beyond speech. God is beyond mind. God who is formless. God who is nameless. God who has no particular place. God who has no denomination. God who is as big as the cosmos and smaller than the atom. Such a funny God man has discovered.

yoga nidra in gondolas! Let us see whether this can happen or not. If it can, we will have a three-day yoga convention in Venice, and after that, we will travel to Slovenia for a three-day intensive yoga seminar. If there is time between the journey from Venice to Ljubljana, then there may be an opportunity to visit some other yoga centres en route. This is what we are planning for next year: Italy and Slovenia as a joint program and yoga tour. Slovenia is a country that I like very much for its nature and originality. The yogic and gurukul seminar will be in Slovenia, and the academic and spontaneous convention in Venice. Prior to that, I shall see you at the Sita Kalyanam in India. Until then, and until next year, Hari Om Tat Sat and thank you for your company, your friendship, your affection, and your being here together at Satyanandashram Hellas under the shadow of Mt Hymettos, in this magical land of Greece. I am sure that the Greek gods have accepted our hands extended in friendship and in the union of yoga.

—Satsang at Satyanandashram Hellas, 5 June 2005

Hari Om Tat Sat

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

The following were three messages from Swamiji for the participants to focus on as part of their future sadhana.

The first message is 'Hari'; the second is 'Om' and the third is 'Tat Sat'. These are the messages of this tour that has taken me to Colombia, Germany, Greece and India.

Hari represents life and its fullness. The richness and wholeness of life is the experience of that nourishing nature called 'Hari' in Sanskrit. 'Om' represents the transcendental nature. If our aspiration in life is to experience Hari and Om, the fullness of life and the transcendental nature, then that (Tat) becomes the truth (Sat). This is the meaning of Hari Om Tat Sat.

These words contain within them the emphasis, direction and aspiration of yoga. We can only experience the fullness of life when we realize ourselves. During this seminar we have discussed how to realize the inner Self. We need to work to improve the quality of our lives, our minds, and characters. These are the first steps on the ladder of spiritual life.

The way to improve the mind is to recognize and develop awareness of its various expressions, qualities and weaknesses. To develop a positive and balanced character, it is important to connect with the positive and virtuous in life. In order to experience life, we should be aware of our actions and reactions. These are the dimensions that we can improve through yoga, before we move on to the higher experiences.

This process of sadhana is like digging a channel for the water to flow through. Once the channel is dug, water can flow through it easily satisfying everyone, and nourishing and fulfilling life. Therefore, connecting with the positive, the virtuous, the transformative and the creative qualities is the aim of yoga. The attainment and fulfilment of this aim is the realization that we are products of the grace of

the divine. When that awareness dawns, then the heart opens. The opening of the heart towards divine grace is the realization of Om.

Live yoga, and experience the transcendence, which is expressed simply in these two words: 'Hari' and 'Om'.

—Swami Niranjan's final talk delivered at Satyanandashram Hellas, 6 June 2005.



Impressions

Preparations for Swami Niranjan's visit

Swami Agnidevi gives us a picture of the preparations preceding Swami Niranjan's visit in 2005.

It was a real blessing and good fortune to participate in the preparations for Swami Niranjan's arrival. What an experience to find myself next to Swami Sivamurti.

Her message was clear: everything should be perfect, just as she had been taught by her guru. She wanted to offer the best possible hospitality to Swamiji. She attended to everything with so much care and love for him that we were astounded, watching her attention to each and every detail. She set the pace to a type of seva yoga fever, which was simultaneously exhausting and rewarding.

The night before Swamiji's arrival, we realized that the floor tiles around the havan area had not been laid yet, and oh! the big Ganesha poster behind Swamiji's seat on the stage was not finished yet, and . . . , but nobody lost courage, the night was all ours.

That unforgettable day dawned. Hundreds of people were lined along the entrance driveway to the ashram to welcome Swamiji. Those sweet moments waiting in anticipation made our hearts beat joyfully. My legs trembled and I was lost for words. Our beloved Swamiji appeared. Feeling our enthusiasm he got out of the car and started walking amongst us, with a big smile on his face. People honoured him with flowers, singing kirtan, and reached out to touch him. There was a feeling of awe everywhere!

Everything that happened in the following days was magic. He moved around in a simple way, he made it easy for people to approach him, he sang and danced. During the talks and satsangs, his crystal voice and words went straight to our hearts. He spoke about how one can walk





the path of yoga, he answered our questions, he gave us inspiration and filled our minds and hearts with his wisdom. Every moment was a chance for an awakening, an opportunity for a lesson.

Impressions from India

Swami Nirvikalpananda gives her impressions from experiences she had with Swami Nirvanan in India.

In 1994, I participated in a one-month course at BSY. More than a hundred sannyasins and Satyananda Yoga teachers from all around the world participated in the course, many of whom had been teaching for twenty years or more.

To everyone's delight, Swamiji gave the early morning yoga classes, teaching pawanmuktasana and pranayama. I will never forget the vitality in his teaching

and how skilfully he used humour in the class to catch our attention and to release our tensions. For example, when giving instructions for naukasana, boat pose, he would say, "Hold the posture and your breath for as long as you can . . . (small pause) Be careful not to burst!" After that, we would all fall to the floor like potato sacks unable to hold our laughter in.

A few days into the course, it was announced that before the morning class, we would have 'drill' practice in the ashram yard. This program started with running all over the ashram barefoot, followed by a dynamic warm-up on the grass. The young swami who was guiding this program seemed to be a karate master and could jump at least half a metre clear above the ground! The rest of us tried to follow under the

watchful eye of Swami Nirvanan. For two days after that, every muscle in my body was in pain! Simply walking up and down the stairs of the ashram was an excruciating experience. Back in the Greek ashram you can imagine what happened. Swami Sivamurti included morning 'drill' in the daily ashram program the whole of the next year!

I'll never forget an incident in the Akhara, when we went to receive Paramahamsaji's darshan. Having just arrived, I was outside the Akhara gate at the registration area. Unexpectedly, Paramahamsaji and Swami Nirvanan appeared, each walking some distance from each other. From my position, I first saw Swami Nirvanan and as my gaze fixed on him, I ran towards him to greet him. In no time, he realized that I was not



aware of Paramahamsaji's presence and before I had a chance to approach him, he signalled me and alerted me to Paramahamsaji's presence, to go to him first. It was the lesson of a lifetime! Swami Niranjan clearly showed me the attitude of a disciple in the presence of his guru. This reminds me of Swami Satsangi's words, when she says that Swami Niranjan has come to teach us how to be a disciple.

The guru's touch

Sannyasi Bhagavati (Biljana Stojanovic, Ph.D. Associate Professor, Vice-Dean, Faculty of International Economics, Megatrend University, Belgrade, Serbia) speaks about her first experience with Swami Niranjan and her subsequent contact with him.

I met Swami Niranjanananda in person for the first time at Satyanandashram Hellas, in 2005, where I was initiated by him into karma sannyasa. It's been said that the guru is with us twenty-four hours a day, but we are not aware of this due to our limitations. At the time of initiation I felt such strength and power emanating from Swamiji and I thought how lucky I was to have him as my guru.

Then I met him again in India in 2008, when Swami Sivamurti introduced me to him and I had the opportunity to speak with him about organizing a yoga movement in Serbia. During the conversation, Swamiji said that yoga without gurukul is like food without salt, hard to digest. In this very simple way Swamiji gave me a lesson, easy to learn and remember.

We may have many yoga teachers, centres and associations that offer various yoga practices, but if

we don't have the gurukul system led by the guru who takes care of us twenty-four hours a day, we are missing that essential ingredient that helps us understand what yoga is really all about and how it works.

On the island of Aigina

Sannyasi Durgashakti and Sannyasi Vedamurti describe Swami Niranjan's informal meeting with the Greek Satyananda Yoga teachers.

On the small and picturesque island of Aigina, about an hour from Athens, Swamiji met with teachers trained in the Satyananda Yoga tradition, from all over Greece. An intense desire to be with him brought everyone together at a small traditional taverna (restaurant) by the sea. The owner was very hospitable and had prepared very tasty traditional Greek food and cool wine, to be enjoyed with Greek music and customs.



It was a bright day and we all ate together and relaxed in each other's company, feeling an inner happiness and unity. Towards the end, the owner of the taverna started to dance and invited Swami Niranjan to join him, following his steps. Swamiji stood up and started dancing and we were all swept up by an irresistible urge to follow him and so we all danced with them!

All for the best

Jignasu Agni Mitra talks of her experience with Swami Niranjan during her initiation.

I had travelled from Germany to Mallorca for a weekend seminar with Swami Niranjan. During the seminar I wanted to take initiation and I had applied for it.

When the time of initiation came and people were called to go to the appointed place for the initiations,



my name was not called. I found out then that it was not on the list, so I thought that my application for initiation had been rejected and that I was not good enough in the eyes of my guru.

Frustrated and in pain, I went out for a walk in the surrounding nature. When I came back to the program the initiation ceremony was over. However, I was taken to the stage where Swami Niranjan was waiting for me and with his bright smile he put a mala around my neck. Tears filled my eyes and I said, "They have forgotten me." He answered with a smile saying, "Nobody is forgotten." It was a remarkable lesson for me that things don't always happen the way we plan or

expect them to in life, rather they happen at the right time and in the best possible way.

Give, give, give . . .

Swami Agnidevi describes the 'serve, love, give' principle in action with Swami Niranjan.

After the huge event of Sita Kalyanam at Rikhia, where Swami Niranjan had innumerable duties to attend to during the twenty-four hour day, he accompanied the Greek group to Munger. Always hungry for his wisdom, we asked him for satsang, which he gave us in abundance. At some point I wondered, "How does he endure it all?" And I heard a voice inside me say, "Give, give, give . . . !"

Chronicles

In 2005, Swami Niranjan visited Greece for the third time. He stayed for three days (4-6 June), and he conducted the three-day seminar: 'Yoga, Balance and Harmony' at Satyanandashram Hellas. The seminar was held 3-5 June.

Although, initially, it was to be an unofficial visit just for the ashram residents and very few people, the news gradually leaked out to the rest of the Satyananda Yoga community in Greece. At some point, the program was announced on the web and, within a very short time, over six hundred and fifty participants from all over the world: Australia, Austria, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Finland,



France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Israel, Italy, Morocco, Netherlands, Serbia, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom and other countries, gathered to be in the presence of Swami Niranjan. Rishi Hridayananda from Australia and Swami Anandananda from Italy, were also present for the occasion.

Swami Niranjan inspired people with his talks on yoga and the use of yoga for systematic transformation of the basic qualities of life.

On Sunday, 5 June, Swami Niranjan initiated 83 into mantra, 53 into name, 141 into jignasu sannyasa, 60 into karma sannyasa, and 6 ashram residents into poorna sannyasa.

On his last day, he had informal meetings with yoga teachers, and also with Father Vissarion, a priest from

the Greek Orthodox Church who had performed a Greek Orthodox Mass at Rikhia in 2000.

Once again, Swami Niranjan captured the hearts of those who had the good fortune to be in his presence. In preparation for his visit, rooms were built, and offices were renovated and redone, and the garden was landscaped.

Long after his visit, the aura he left behind could still be felt in the ashram, confirming what Swami Satyananda had said during his 1985 visit to this ashram: "I call this ashram the ashram of bliss!"

Following his visit to Greece, Swami Niranjan returned to India. The lectures and satsangs delivered by him during his visit, were compiled into a booklet: "Yoga, balance, harmony", and published by Satyanandashram Hellas.



2008

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Invitation leaflet for Swami Niranjana's visit

Day-by-Day Itinerary

Day-by-Day Itinerary

Swami Niranjana arrived at Satyanandashram Hellas, following an Eastern European tour that had started in Slovenia, moved to Croatia, and then to Hungary, before coming to Greece. He stayed at the ashram in Paiania for two days (28-29 May) and conducted lectures and satsangs for the 'Living Yoga' seminar organized by Satyanandashram Hellas.

Tuesday–Thursday, 27–29 May

The program 'Living Yoga' with Swami Niranjana was held at Satyanandashram Hellas. The program was attended by approximately 500 participants.

Tuesday, 27 May

A welcome to all was given by various ashram sannyasins of the ashram, together with an akhand kirtan, an introductory talk, chants, bhajans, and meditation.

Wednesday, 28 May

Swami Niranjana arrived at the Paiania ashram around noon, and received a very warm welcome with kirtan and flowers given by those present in the ashram.

Early in the afternoon, Swami Niranjana opened his seminar with Guru Pooja. After being welcomed to the seminar and to the ashram by Swami Sivamurti and Swami Aparokshananda, he delivered his opening discourse on 'Living Yoga'.

Later in the evening, Swami Niranjana gave a satsang where he answered questions on yoga and spirituality, God, the guru-disciple relationship, and sannyasa.



Before the satsang, there was a cultural evening which included kirtans, a play about Socrates' view of love, traditional dances from various areas of Greece, and Greek music and songs played by the ashram's music team.

A series of workshops also took place by sannyasins and acharyas, including a workshop in the morning on 'Nada Yoga' by Swami Savikalpa and Swami Maitreyi; and in the afternoon, two workshops: 'Yoga in Daily Life' by Swami Vishwashakti (Slovenia) and 'Awareness in Daily Life' by Swami Anandananda (Italy).

Thursday, 29 May

In the morning, Swami Niranjana conducted a havan and gave initiations. Over 80 people were initiated by Swami Niranjana into mantra, spiritual name, jignasu sannyasa and karma sannyasa. During this program, Swami Niranjana gave a talk on the meaning and better understanding of initiations, and also on sannyasa.

Following the initiations, a workshop: 'Tools for Transformation' was given by Swami Pragya-murti (UK).

Swami Niranjana closed the seminar with a satsang answering further questions on tantra and spiritual life, as well as the latest developments in the Satyananda Yoga tradition in India.

Early in the afternoon, Swami Niranjana departed for Bulgaria, for his next series of programs. He was accompanied by a large number of Greek sannyasins and disciples.







The most common form of yoga is ashtanga yoga, the eightfold path as outlined by the Sage Patanjali. It is the yoga of personal, inner, psycho-emotional development. The eight stages of ashtanga yoga are classified as physical, psychological, spiritual and the cultivation of virtues



Living Yoga

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

It is nice being here once again with all of you. I am truly happy to be in this beautiful country with its beautiful people. This time I have been on a five-country yoga tour. We had a wonderful first program in Slovenia on the subject of 'Tantra Yoga: Evolution in Life'. Then we went on to Croatia where we had a program on 'Yoga and Stress Management'. That was the topic, but I called it 'Yoga and Distress Management'. From Croatia we went on to Hungary where the subject was 'Yoga: A Science of Total Wellbeing'. Now that we are in Greece, the topic given is 'Living Yoga'. Ever since I was first told about this topic, I



have been trying to think about what living yoga means, and while I continue to think about it I will talk to you about some other things.

I will start with the teachings of our grandfather guru, Swami Sivananda. For him yoga started after the perfection of Patanjali's yoga. For him the stages of Patanjali's yoga represented the drive to attain, and after attainment you have to experience living. We are going to look into what the attainment is that we see in Sage Patanjali's yoga and how we live the experience of yoga in Sivananda Yoga. I will start with the teachings of Swami Sivananda because they create the foundation for living the experience of yoga.

Yoga, as we know it in society today, conveys mainly the teachings of hatha yoga, the physical aspect of yoga for experiencing better wellness and fitness of the body. There are other schools, which emphasize meditation to cultivate spiritual awareness. Then there are other schools, which have adopted one form of yoga as their teaching, but this does not represent yoga as it should. Hatha yoga is not the one and only yoga, nor is raja yoga, meditation, or any other practice, for all these different paths and practices of yoga represent only one side or branch. The branch of hatha yoga is physical in nature, raja yoga is psychological, jnana yoga is intellectual, and bhakti yoga is more emotional. In this manner, every branch of

yoga deals with a particular area of the personality whose abilities and qualities are enhanced by the different practices.

The most common form of yoga is ashtanga yoga, the eightfold path as outlined by the Sage Patanjali. It is the yoga of personal, inner, psycho-emotional development. The eight stages of ashtanga yoga are classified as physical, psychological, spiritual and the cultivation of virtues. The practice of yamas and niyamas deal with the fine-tuning of the human personality; they harness the creativity of human nature, character and personality. The practice

own spiritual nature. According to Sage Patanjali, all these stages combined represent the most comprehensive plan for the development of the human personality. Our progression through these systems of yoga stands for our drive to attain something qualitative in life. Our goal is to develop a better quality of character, body, mind and emotions.

However, after we have gone through this progression, what do we do next? Does our journey stop after acquiring the good and the beautiful in life? No, this journey results in a transformation in the realm of consciousness



of asanas and pranayama provide wellness for the body by detoxifying, enhancing the energies and removing imbalances. The systems of pratyahara and dharana regulate the emotional and psychological expressions of the mind. The meditation and samadhi components of yoga make it possible to come into contact with our

and energy. The attainments are a transformation in perceptions and experience of consciousness and energy. With this change in perspective on life, a special philosophy begins to develop within ourselves. This is a philosophy which is not based on receiving, but on an opening up of the mind, ideas, sentiments, feelings and



Theatre play adaptation of Plato's symposium, featuring Socrates speaking on the meaning of love

has grown to maturity and opens up in full bloom, the colours that have been developing while the flower was a bud are now visible and can be appreciated by everyone. The smell, which was previously confined to the bud, has now become a fragrance wafting in the wind. In creation too, we see these two states: one of acquiring and one of expressing. The flower has gone through a process from acquiring to expressing. In the same way, life is a process of acquiring and expressing. However, people generally identify more with acquiring and less with expressing. It is this preoccupation with acquiring that makes us self-

body and our concepts are put into a straightjacket. We are taught to look at the world in a particular way and that which does not fit into that view does not exist.

There was a time when we were aware of the glory and beauty of the sunrise and the sunset. They were something mystical and attractive, harmonious, fulfilling and uplifting. Today, when we look at the sunset or sunrise, our mathematical and scientific mind breaks down the sunrays into electrons that hit the atmosphere. The light particles spread everywhere and thus create different hues and colours. We have become sequential



oriented, self-centred and selfish. Moreover, it closes the doors of the intellect, the heart, the emotions and the mind. We are happy in our own world. Challenges to our comfort zone are rejected. That which does not conform to our ideas of fulfilment and joy is disregarded. It turns out that we live our life in a straightjacket. Our mind, our

and linear, losing touch with our artistic and creative side, which can appreciate nature and beauty. The following joke illustrates this point. There are two hemispheres in the human brain, the right and the left. For most of us there is nothing left in the right hemisphere and there is nothing right in the left hemisphere! Jokes aside, what is



important is that one finds a balance between the artistic and the creative, the logical and the sequential. In my experience, the artistic and creative side has the tendency to open up, to give and to expand. On the other hand, the logical and linear side has the tendency to accumulate, receive and acquire. Furthermore, it is natural that when we look at the world through our intellect, we want to see what is beneficial for 'me'.

However, when we see the world through our heart, it is a more selfless perspective that emerges. We ask ourselves "What can I do for others?" or "How can I



Discipleship

From the moment I met Swami Niranjan, way back when he was still in America, I noticed this special quality in him. He is the epitome of a disciple. Each and every disciple should try to emulate him if they want to succeed in discipleship. That is the purpose of his birth: to show to the world how a disciple should live, act, think and perform. That is the lesson he will teach to the world: how to be a disciple.

It is hard to explain this very special relationship between two persons that, although enacted at many levels, is essentially spiritual. Destiny brings the guru and disciple together. The guru enters the disciple's life to uplift him and, in some cases, the guru actually searches for the disciple towards whom destiny is beckoning. Destiny has her favorites and one of them is Swami Niranjan. For, she placed him right in the lap of his guru.

(Extract from © Bihar School of Yoga, originally published in "Moving On...", Swami Satyasangananda Saraswati, page 9")

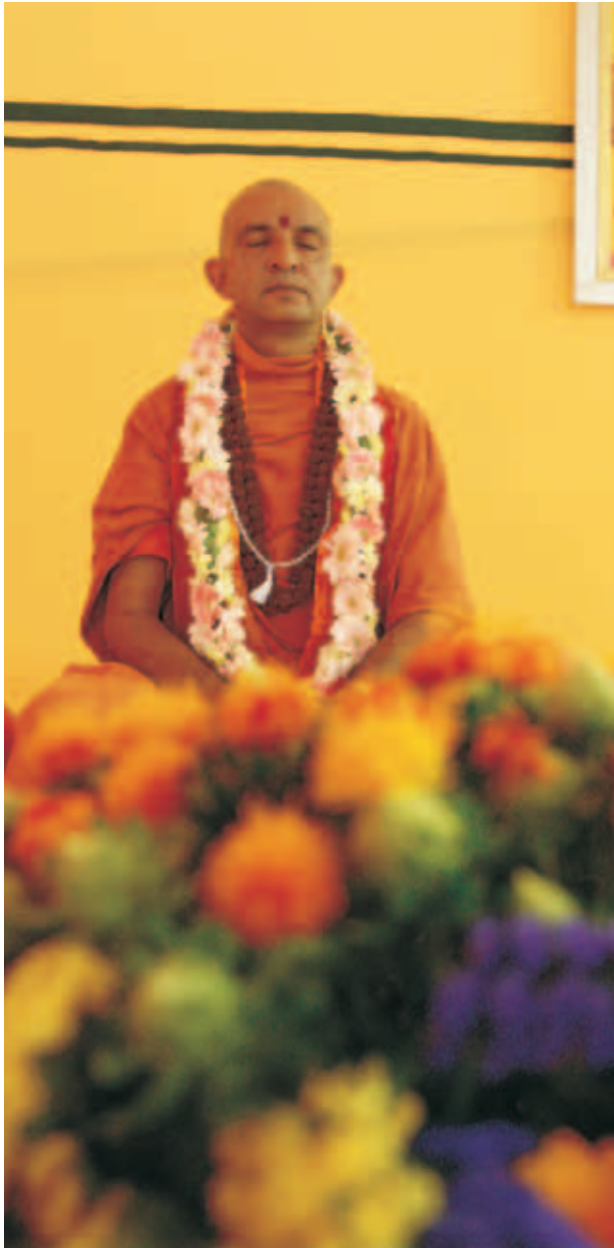
connect with others?" The head receives; the heart gives. Therefore, it can be said that in Sage Patanjali's yoga you are dealing with the expressions of the mind, from pratyahara to dharana to dhyana to samadhi. That is where you attain, acquire, and become a qualitative person. Going a step further, in Swami Sivananda's yoga, the expression of yoga begins with four things: the ability to serve, love, give and remain pure from all influences. Service represents a selfless connection with people, the environment, nature and the world. Love also represents a connection with people, the environment, the world and nature. Love is not conditional, demanding or expecting, but giving. What I mean here by love is not the sensorial, sensual or physical gratification, but the spiritual, the broad and compassionate connection. Then comes the subject of giving, where one does not hold on to attachments, but acknowledges the realities of life. Giving and sharing represent the encouragement that you can provide for another person in order to grow and mature at all levels. The fourth stage is purification, to maintain inner purity, simplicity and innocence. Together, these four represent the beginning of Swami Sivananda's yoga. Moreover, to me they also represent a philosophy, a state of understanding that dawns with the perfection of yoga.

I believe that a basic philosophy that nurtures spiritual development is important in everybody's life; a philosophy that is beyond the social, religious or material perspective of life. This philosophy is based on selfless connection, involvement or association. You know that you are experiencing compassion when you feel compassionate towards strangers and not only those people whom you call your own. You know when you have learned to love because then you begin to love total strangers and not only those with whom you identify. You know you are transforming in your cocoon and becoming a butterfly as

your heart opens to the world and to the environment around you. A spiritual philosophy is a must, a necessary component in everybody's life in order to enrich life and to understand the process of yoga.

Yoga means union, to unite. However, this union, at whatever level, philosophical, religious, physical or psychological, can only happen when you have an understanding of the process of union. If you presume yoga is a union of the individual consciousness with the higher consciousness, then you need to know the individual consciousness and you need to know the higher consciousness, and then bring these two together. If you consider it as a union of the dissipated energies of the body, you need to know which energies are dissipating in order to unite them. If you approach it as a union of the dissipated states of consciousness, then you need to have an understanding of those states of consciousness which are dissipated in order to bring them together. From my perspective and understanding, the word union is too broad a category. It is like a large bag in which you can throw everything and it becomes part of it. The most basic understanding of a personal spiritual philosophy that I can think of is the union of the intellect and the sentiments. It is a union of practical applied wisdom, with a heart full of desire to connect and do good. Therefore, one has to have a proper philosophy and apply that to life. According to Swami Sivananda, 'serve, love, give, purify' constitute the four foundations of a personal spiritual philosophy.

Furthermore, according to the yogic literature, maintaining positive and uplifting associations is a must in developing the appropriate philosophy in life. One should be observant and watchful of one's associations. One should know what the appropriate and the inappropriate are. If in a basket of good apples, you have one rotten apple, what do you do? You remove the rotten apple. Why



do you remove the rotten apple? Because you believe that one rotten apple can spoil the other good apples, and that is true. Ninety-nine good apples cannot rectify the rotten apple. However, one bad apple can destroy the ninety-nine good ones. That is the power of negative association. One percent of negativity can change and alter the remaining ninety-nine percent of positive strengths and qualities, but ninety-nine percent positivity cannot change the power of that one percent of negativity. Therefore, one has to enforce one's own psychology with positive affirmations, thoughts and sankalpas.

One should also be aware of those associations and connections that restrict and inhibit the expression of the human personality. When a farmer plants a special seed in the ground, he also makes the necessary arrangements to protect that seed from the vermin, birds, animals, insects and the weather. That same principle applies to the cultivation of your positive associations in life. You have to protect your positivity from the negative influences and stresses, which create an imbalance in life. You have to regulate, observe and monitor your associations in life. In associations, connect with the positive, the creative and the constructive. Don't try to change the negative. After all, every rose grows on a stem which is full of thorns. You can't be going around with a knife removing all the thorns from all the roses. You have to connect with the beauty, the harmony and the nature of the rose and not with the stem. So, what do you need to do? Ignore the thorns that are there and keep on looking at the beauty of the rose. Even if you find thorny situations, thorny people and circumstances in life, look at the beauty. When I was saying this in Australia about one month ago, somebody asked me, "What about the family members?" There are family members who are destructive, detrimental and restrictive, and those who are optimistic and

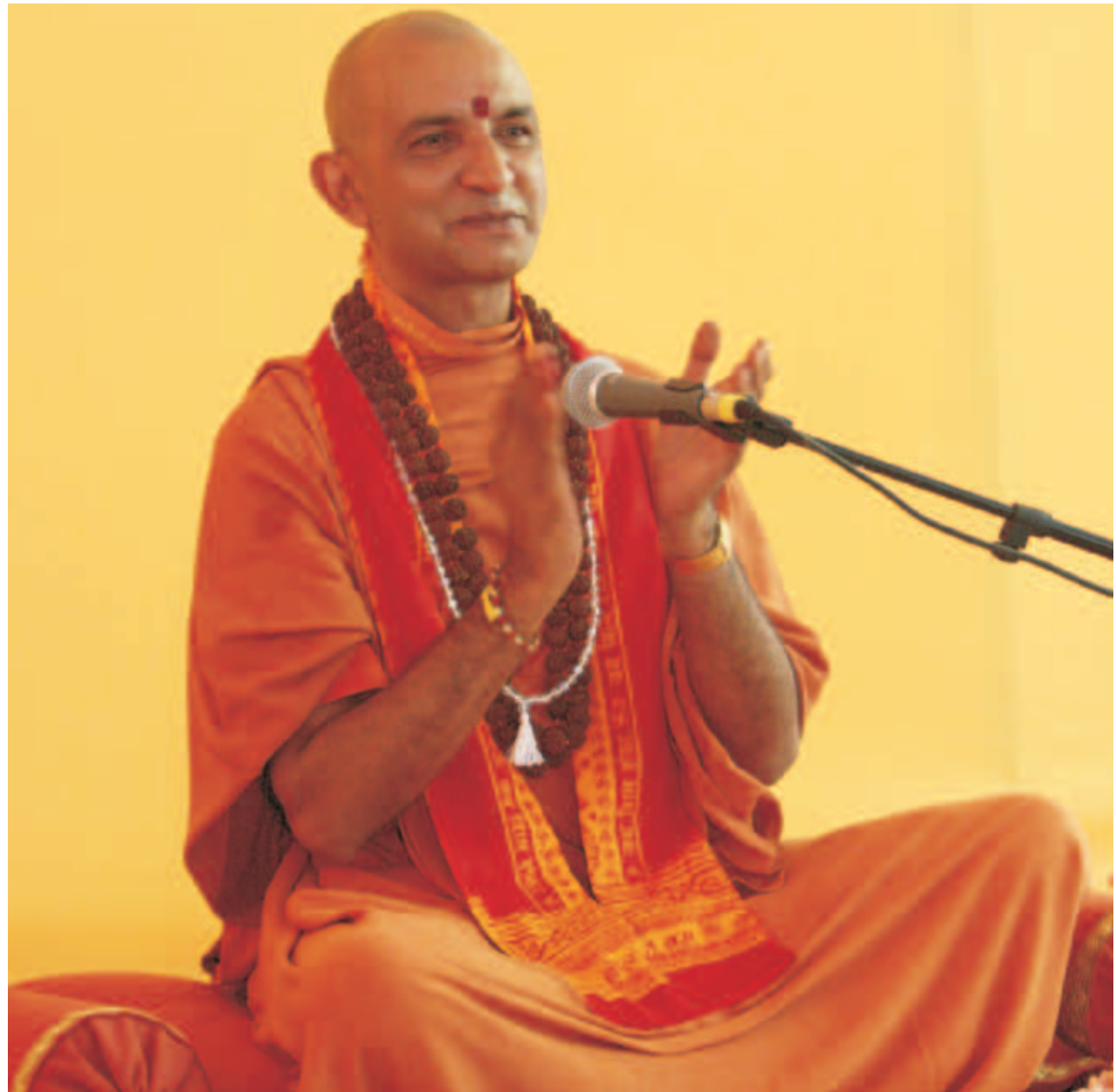
positive. How do we deal with them? Remember that acknowledging your association is your personal matter. I can only say that the entire nature is governed by the plus and the minus, the good and the bad. The balance is always fifty-fifty, just like day and night. When it is fifty-fifty, there is harmony. Our personality, our nature is also fifty-fifty, good and bad. When we are anxious, when we are frustrated, depressed, negative or pessimistic, we are connecting with the dark side of our personality. When we are at peace with ourselves, we connect with the light side of our personality. The entire life in creation is fifty-fifty, plus and minus, positive and negative, optimistic and pessimistic. A dog can lick your face one day and take a big bite out of it the next. A human being who is our friend today can turn against us tomorrow. People who are in love feel so united today, and tomorrow will be totally disunited and separate. It depends on which aspect of our personality or perspective we connect with. Certainly, connecting with the positive and the optimistic in life goes hand in hand with cultivating right associations.

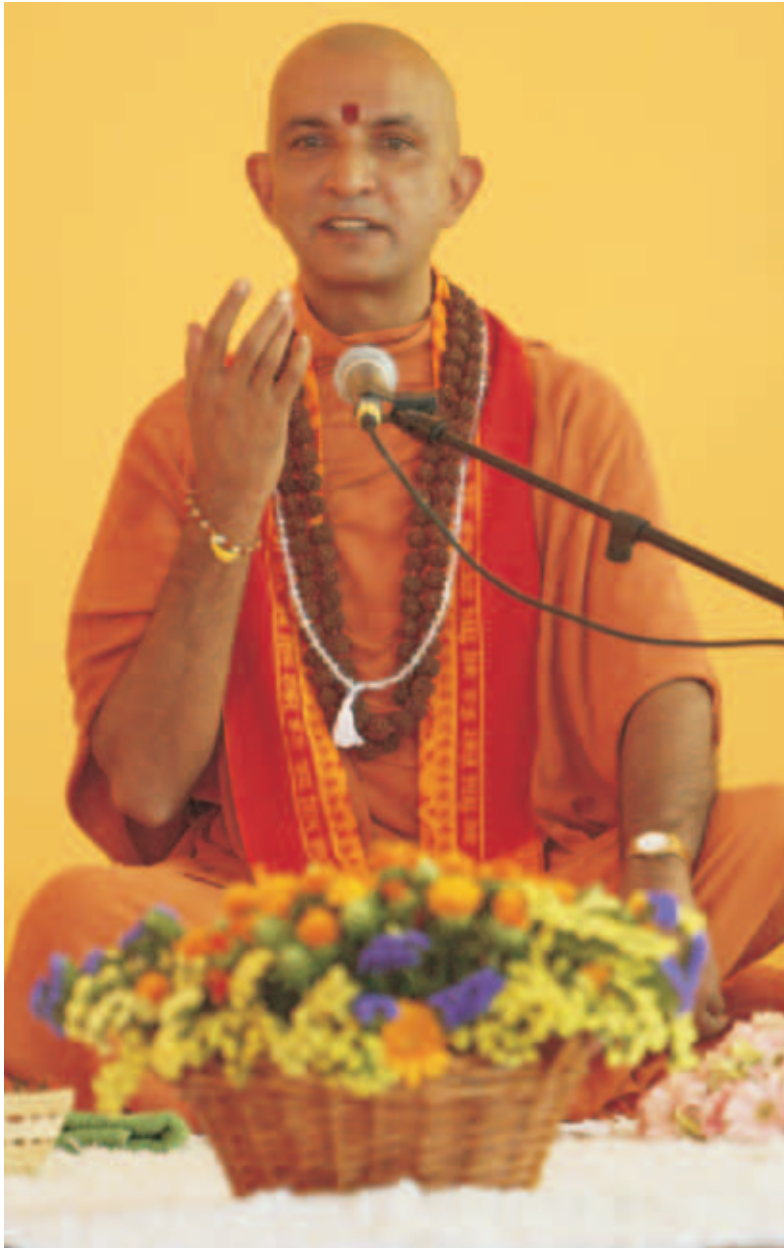
In order to develop the right associations, another important effort has to be made by everyone, which is to maintain a positive and balanced attitude in life. This is possibly the most difficult thing because of the different types of stresses we are under. What is stress? Stress disconnects us from our inner harmony, our strength, optimism, clarity, creativity and constructive participation in life. To maintain a positive perspective is the hardest thing to acquire in life. Analyze yourself for a few moments and see if you are optimistic or pessimistic by nature. Do you feel happy when you look at all the challenges in life, or do you feel depressed when you see them in front of you? Analyze this and you will know what kind of nature is predominant right now. To remain positive is the hardest sadhana of life. When we talk of 'Living Yoga'

we try to understand the components of awareness and positivity that need to be cultivated. Just as salt gives taste to food, awareness gives taste to the different mental expressions and experiences. One can be positive in life only if awareness is there constantly and continuously. Yoga attempts to make you observe yourself, to make you realize yourself. Yoga inspires you to become a witness, an observer of your actions, performance and expressions of life in general. Together with awareness, preservation of positivity keeps one in touch with the present.

The third aspect that the yogic literature talks about as part of a personal philosophy is the cultivation of humility. This is the continuation of right association and maintaining a positive attitude.

The fourth aspect of yogic philosophy is that you stay in touch with your own inner strength. In the past, civilizations around the Mediterranean gave every male child, at the age of twelve or thirteen a proper exam. The child was taken blindfolded into the forest at night and was told to sit on the stump of a tree. There he had to spend the entire night alone in the middle of the forest. He was unable to see anything, and hearing the wild noises he had to confront his own fear. The child was not to tell his experience to other children. It was only his personal experience and survival through the night which made him into a man. Many people would pass their night absolutely frightened, listening to the wild sounds and noises. When in the morning the blindfold was removed, they would discover that their father was sitting on a nearby tree having watched over them the whole night long and protecting them from wild animals. The child did not know this. The same thing happens to us too. We are blindfolded. We feel we are alone and become frightened and insecure when we hear different noises. Sometimes we might feel that somebody is coming to eat us up, or that situations are going to destroy us, that we





are unable to handle circumstances and situations. We get nervous because we can't see. However, when our blindfold is removed, then we realize that somebody else was sitting there beside us watching over us all the time. Therefore, the fourth component of yogic philosophy is to develop and cultivate that faith and trust in the inner strength, in the inner presence of the transcendental higher consciousness.

To sum up, we have looked at the philosophy of Swami Sivananda where he speaks of serving, loving, giving and purifying, as the foundation for a spiritual philosophy and a spiritual expression in life. We have also looked at the classical yogic presentation of the personal aspirations in life, the cultivation of a positive association, maintaining positivity and optimism at all times, becoming humble and connecting with the inner strength. If we are able to adopt these principles of Swami Sivananda or of yoga as our stepping-stone into the spiritual discoveries of life, then our perspective, our vision and our understanding will change. Life will be more harmonious with nature. We will begin to live a new kind of lifestyle that joins together the material and spiritual aspects. Shankaracharya, one of the great thinkers and philosophers of eighth century India, once said that just as a bird needs two wings to fly high up into the sky, so does human life need the support of both the material and the spiritual aspects in order to nurture and express itself. Finding this balance in your lifestyle is the key to living yoga. What kind of understanding, what kind of change do we need to make in our lifestyles in order to live in

a yogic way? Not much. It is only the cultivation of an understanding of the different expressions of human personality and the modification and regulation of desires.

One of the important techniques to understand and improve our lifestyle is the SWAN sadhana. The word SWAN is an acronym for strength, weakness, ambition and need. Recognize what your strengths are and cultivate them to their maximum potential. Recognize what your weaknesses and limitations are and try to transcend them, try to be immune to their influences and try and develop them into positive strengths. Know what your ambitions are and whether they are attainable or whether they are just your expectations without any proper foundation. Know what your needs are and prioritize them. Once you have observed these four dimensions of your own character, you can begin to connect with your strengths and be clear about your needs. Then this awareness will bring about a qualitative change in your lifestyle.

A second fine-tuning that has to take place is observing our expectations. Each action in life contains within it the seed of an expectation, a reward or a reaction. That is a well-understood subject. How do we identify with those expectations, with those rewards, with those responses, is to be observed. How we can be one hundred per cent creative in our performance, also has to be known. When you drive a car, you know when to put the car into first gear or neutral. You know when to put on the brakes or accelerate. Nobody applies this simple rule, this



simple principle to life. In life everybody wants to drive in fourth gear, without braking. Even at a red light we accelerate to the full. However, this is not good for our performance. Sometimes you go through first gear, then you brake, you stand still and then again you move on. Only when you have an open stretch of highway ahead of

you, can you go on overdrive cruise control and enjoy the scenery.

Our lifestyle is modified by developing immunity to responses and reactions of an action, and also by observing the four natural traits of our personality: the strengths, the weaknesses, the ambitions and the needs.

In this way, we bring the attainments of yoga on to a level of life that can be experienced and expressed. When we are able to bring yoga into the expressible situations in life, then we begin to live yoga.

Living yoga does not mean that you practise your asanas three times a day. Living yoga does not mean that you meditate in the morning and all day you go around with a holier than thou attitude. Living yoga means that you incorporate the yogic principles to fine-tune your nature so that your emotional, intellectual and physical abilities and faculties are guided by inner strengths. These inner strengths are the ones that ultimately nourish and enhance life. Then life is seen as the reality, as auspicious and as beautiful. Everyone likes to admire beauty. Let us take the sankalpa to make our life a beautiful one.

—Opening discourse, Satyanandashram Hellas,
28 May 2008



Talk on Initiations

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

‘Initiation’ in Sanskrit is called diksha, which means to acquire a vision or the ability to see. Diksha is a process of becoming aware of the inner experiences. The first and foremost diksha in yoga is the mantra diksha. From the yogic perspective, you don’t need any other diksha beyond mantra. In yoga there is no tradition of jignasu or karma. Yoga deals specifically with the effort to try and access the deeper layers of the mind. It is the mantra that helps in accessing the deeper dimensions of our nature.

There are two ways of doing the mantra: the spontaneous and natural way or the sadhana way. In the natural way you keep on repeating the mantra mentally with the eyes open while performing any activity during the day. It is up to you whether you do it for one minute, five minutes or more. The second way is the sadhana way, in which you select a time and a place for yourself. During this time you sit down, isolate yourself from your daily difficulties, problems and environment, and just concentrate on the mantra practice.

The best time for mantra sadhana is in the evening, when you have completed the jobs of the day and when there are no pressing engagements. For ten minutes do not identify with your body, your family or your society, but identify with the purity of your inner nature. Seated in a comfortable posture with the eyes closed, practise your mantra, two rounds on your mala. In the twenty-four hours of your day, you spend twenty-three hours and fifty minutes for your family and friends, society, profession, desires and expectations, and the ten remaining minutes to explore your own inner nature. For ten minutes, there is no wife, no husband, no children, and no society, only the experience and practice of mantra. If for ten minutes you cannot isolate yourself from your immediate areas of attachment and attraction, then remember that the practice of meditation will hold difficulties for you. You have to cultivate the ability to extract yourself from your attachments and the links with the world, and just focus on the experience of your inner self combining this awareness with mantra. This is the simplest form of mantra sadhana.

Some people are taking jignasu and karma sannyasa initiations. This is not a yogic initiation, but a sannyasa initiation. Sannyasa means adopting a lifestyle with an awareness and an understanding of how we live our life. Sannyasa also means developing an understanding of how we can better our life. Modification of our lifestyle begins with jignasu and karma initiations. Don’t even dream of poorna sannyasa because it is



not something to be taken lightly. Just because one is inspired and wants it, is not a good enough reason to take poorna sannyasa. Just because one wants to be closer to something, it is not a good enough reason to take poorna sannyasa. The understanding of poorna sannyasa has to evolve and should not be connected with your emotional expectations and attachments. Therefore, we are not going to talk about poorna sannyasa and don’t even ask me about it. Just try to perfect your sannyasa in jignasu and karma, and this will be your biggest achievement in life. However, I realize that ninety per cent of the people here have taken initiation to become part of a spiritual club. I’m not talking to those people but to the ten per cent who want to make a qualitative change to their life by adopting a different lifestyle.

The first initiation in the process of the modification of one’s lifestyle is the jignasu initiation. Here we have the enquirer, the questioner. In life the questions do not begin with “Who is God?” or “What is creation?” Life begins with the discovery of one’s personal creative nature. Jignasu sannyasa helps us understand our own personal nature, in the form of our strengths and weaknesses, our ambitions and needs. It is the SWAN principle, and the SWAN sadhana is for jignasu sannyasins. That way you are able to discover what your



potential is, what your weaknesses are, and how to connect with the positive and the strong in your life.

After you have explored your nature in the form of strengths and weaknesses, ambitions and needs, and after you have found a balance in your own nature, then you move on to the karma sannyasa initiation. Here an attempt is made to improve the performances of life. We try to bring the component of clarity and creativity into our performance and action. An attempt is made to outgrow the influences of our reactions, to develop detachment from the expected results and to connect with creativity. The understanding of karma yoga is an important aspect of karma sannyasa. There is a passage in the Bhagavad Gita which says that one should perform an action with total awareness and creativity and without any expectations regarding the effects of the action. Action has to be performed with the conviction that it will lead you to inner balance and purity. This is how the meaning of involvement and action has been described in the Bhagavad Gita. According to this, each action should become a way of freeing one's self from the limitations, whereas at present each action leads us to further involvement and bondage in the world. So it is the realization of creativity and freedom in our involvements which is the aim and aspiration of karma sannyasa. These are the only two initiations required for people in the East and in the West.

—Talk at Satyanandashram Hellas, 29 May 2008



Havan

We shall do this havan by chanting the mantra Aim Hrim Klim Swaha one hundred and eight times. The mantra Aim Hrim Klim will be chanted three times and Swaha once. Aim is the seed sound, the seed mantra of creation. It is also the mantra of Saraswati, the force or the energy that brings wisdom into life. Hrim is the sound responsible for the energy of prosperity and Klim is the mantra of change. Thus, wisdom, fulfilment and transformation are the three concepts represented in this mantra. These are the mantras that Paramahamsaji has given for Rikhiapeth, with which the energy of the cosmic power can be invoked. Bring your right hand to your heart and as you chant Swaha at the end, make a symbolic offering to the fire. As you make the symbolic offering, believe that all the restrictive and negative personality traits are being pulled out and burned in the fire. Each time you pull something restrictive and negative from inside you, what remains in you is the pure self. Therefore, connect with your inner purity, with your openness, and with your peace and harmony.



Satsang

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

I have realized that there are two kinds of Greeks and two kinds of Greece. For me, the symbol for Greece is the coconut. The coconut is hard on the outside while soft on the inside. This is how I see the Greeks. Sometimes it is so difficult to penetrate the shields which they have created in front of them. You look at them and smile, but they look the other way and there is a complete brick wall. This is like the Greek intellectual hardness. However, as you probe deeper, you come to the soft point, where they express their unity of spirit, their joy and love, and also their quest for truth. Therefore, on the outside the Greeks are as dry and barren as their country, which is rocky with olive trees. But you look at their hearts and you find this beautiful warm openness, a sentiment full of love and laughter, and it is a very nice combination. Thank God only the Greeks have this combination!

Spiritual life

Q. In your biography we find that you are considered a yogi from birth. Could you say something about this?

Swamiji: It is a personal question, but I will attempt to answer it anyway. I am a yogi from birth, for from the beginning I was given the opportunity to grow up in the shade of yoga, just as many other children who are here today. There is nothing special about it. I come from a very humble background, but my parents had the opportunity to be associates and disciples of Paramahamsaji. Therefore, right from my early days, I grew up in his tutelage. Just as one day every child here will be thankful to their parents for giving them the opportunity to grow



up in the shade of yoga, I am also grateful to my parents.

As far as I am concerned, I know I have no ability. I will give you an example of what I mean. A sculptor picks up a stone and the stone becomes a statue, which is admired by everyone. What is being admired here? The stone was a stone before it became an image and remains a stone even after it is sculpted. That which has to be admired is the handiwork of the artist, in this case, our guru. The rock shouldn't get the credit, but the artist.

Swami Sivamurti: I would just like to add a little story in this place. There were two pieces of rock which came from the same quarry. One was sculpted into a beautiful statue and people worshipped it. The other piece of rock was put on the floor and people stood on it to worship the statue. One day, the rock on the floor asked the one who had become a statue, "How is it possible that everybody steps on me but worships you?" The statue replied, "Don't you remember that when we first came from the quarry we were one rock? When the sculptor took us, he broke us in half and first he started to work on you, but you made such a fuss, you screamed so much and cried out, 'Don't touch me, don't try and change my shape, I am okay as I am!' So the sculptor put you down and picked up

me. He started to work on me and I thought to myself that there must be some reason why the sculptor is hitting me and putting little pegs in me, trying to change my shape. I kept quiet and didn't say a word. The result is that people stand on you and worship me today." So, is it the sculptor or is it the rock?

Swamiji: This sounds like a piece from the life of Zorba the Greek. It is a Greek perspective on events. There is another perspective of the same two rocks. When the rock on the floor asked the rock which had become the image, "How come people stand on me and worship you?" this rock replied, "Everybody has to fulfil their destiny and role. You are hard, therefore you cannot be shaped into an image. However, you have had the strength to support the weight of all of those who step on you, for you are strong enough to take the abuse of everyone. The sculptor saw my weakness, therefore decided to give me beauty." So, each nature and each character fulfils its role.

Q. You are the successor to Swami Satyananda. I believe you have big organizations. How can you have any time for yourself and for your sadhana?

Swamiji: Let me clarify certain things since this question has been asked. To begin with, I am no leader of an organization, and today I don't have any organization to lead. I was, for some time, the appointed president of the Bihar School of Yoga. Just as there is a president for Sivananda Math, just as there is a president of the Yoga Research Foundation, or the Yoga Publication Trust, or the Bihar Yoga Bharati, so there is a president for the Bihar School of Yoga. Being president is not a big deal and the governing body can change you at any time, so you are at their mercy. This year, the governing body of Bihar School of Yoga has made me jobless as they have appointed a new president.



As for the second question, about being the successor to Swami Satyananda, yes, he has announced this. However, just by somebody's announcing it, one does not become it. It takes years and years of preparation and hard work. Until today I was not able to go in that direction, for how can I, with my limited abilities, imbibe the spirit of my guru, Swami Satyananda? When a little candle goes to meet the sun, it dissolves on the way. To become the successor of Swami Satyananda I know is an impossible feat. I can never become that. Nevertheless, I can attempt to become, if not the sun, at least a candle, and if not a candle, at least a spark.

It is a new direction that I have received this year, so you could say that from this year I am embarking on a journey to experience and live sannyasa. Until now I was engaged in other things. Maybe one day, when we meet again, you can ask me the same question and I'll tell you how far I still have to walk to become that. You can help me with your good wishes and prayers. This will support me on my journey.

To conclude, what I want to clarify is that I am not a leader of a big organization, nor am I the successor of Swami Satyananda. He has given me a destination and I have to walk towards it. If I reach my destination, maybe one day you can say, "Yes, he was the successor", and if I don't reach that destination, you can say, "At least he tried."

Sannyasa

Q. You have taken sannyasa at a very early age in your life. Could you define the role of sannyasins in society? In what way is it different from the householder's life?

Swamiji: I do not think that I can define sannyasa to you, as there is nothing comparable to this tradition in the West. The un-initiates think of sannyasa as a religious tradition of monks and recluses, of thinkers and philosophers. They think of sannyasa as a tradition of renunciation. This is the closest that we can come to it from our modern perspective in order to understand the identity of a sannyasin. However, sannyasa in reality never represented a religious order. Rather, it represented a tradition in which people devoted their life to preserving knowledge and wisdom, which could lead humanity towards development and enable them to explore the spiritual dimension. They realized that living in society will inevitably create distress and strife for people and that a reconnection with their spiritual nature would lead people to a greater, homogeneous and creative expression of their life. Therefore, the tradition of sannyasa evolved with the aim of discovering the spiritual dimensions, exploring the spiritual nature, and preserving and continuing with knowledge for the development of human nature and personality. This traditional knowledge became known, in the course of time, as different philosophies and systems of acquiring self-discipline. A sannyasin means a person who has dedicated their life to exploring the unexplored within oneself.

There is a difference between the householder's life and that of a sannyasin's. Society supports and encourages the sannyasa tradition, knowing that this tradition is the repository of the ancient knowledge and practical wisdom, which is imparted by sannyasins whenever the world stands at a crossroads. Different teachings in history have come down to us whenever there was the need for them. For example, Buddha taught compassion and non-violence in a violent world. Shankaracharya taught unity in diversity when people forgot their own inner strength and went their different ways. Christ came with the teachings of compassion and love in an uncompassionate, unloving world. Swami Sivananda and Swami Satyananda brought the practice of yoga to us to experience the flowering of our personality in a stressful environment. The sannyasa





tradition as a whole has always provided a positive solution to the stressful situations in life from time to time. Sannyasa was relevant in the past, it is relevant in the present and shall be relevant in the future as well. The householders support the sannyasa tradition and the sannyasins in turn teach the householders to tread righteously on the appropriate path, in which they can express their creativity and experience wholeness.

Q. In the course of giving diksha, initiation, how is the name and mantra chosen? How is it decided that it is appropriate to one particular person?

Swamiji: Why? Are you interested in giving name and mantra to other people? That is a trade secret, I can't tell you. Better luck next time.

Your tradition lays great stress on seva, bheth, service and giving. Please say some words about their importance.

This is the philosophy of Sivananda yoga. Let me explain by giving you an example. Let's say you have practised years of meditation and suddenly one day you see your Creator in front of you. You are very happy and you say to Him, "I am so happy to be in your presence." However, the Maker, God, will say he is not happy to see you, as you

have been a very selfish person all your life even though you have struggled to achieve a level of perfection. You have always wanted everything for your own personal gratification. The meditation which you practised was to have personal gratification. The samadhi which you attained was to have a personal glimpse of the Maker. You have also withdrawn from the outside world. Then God will say, "Now you have to make the effort to uplift other people with your skills and abilities. Until now you have lived a part of eternity in a selfish way, now you must live a part of eternity in a selfless way, and at the end when you come back I will take you in my arms." God sends you back. Now, how do you express your creativity to fulfil the mandate of God? By connecting with people, by helping those in need, by providing opportunities to those who have none to develop in life. This is the form of service, loving and giving that comes naturally when you have attained an illuminated spiritual state.

In history, when you look at the life of the enlightened beings and saints in all cultures and religions, you will find that the hallmark of their life has been service: loving and giving unconditionally. The spiritual perfection in their life is represented by these three acts: serve, love and give. This we see very strongly in both the western Christian tradition and the eastern ones. Therefore, the answer is in front of our eyes: express the creative in you to bring out the beautiful in nature around you. This is the selfless contribution that an individual can make for the betterment of the world. This is the philosophy that has to be cultivated in life. Our guru Swami Satyananda has given a practical approach to this mandate of Swami Sivananda. Yoga is a gift he gave us to develop ourselves at a personal level. Now it is the seva opportunity that we find in front of us. This gives us the opportunity to connect on the outer level with our pure sentiments. The outer level means the

social level where we fulfil the needs of people, providing them with opportunities to become independent and self-reliant in life. Many of you have been a witness to this process unfolding in Rikhia where Paramahamsaji is now. The world becomes a better place when there is a positive connection and association between people. The world becomes a deadly place when everybody withdraws into their own shell. We can choose how we want the future world to be. Remember:

It is only a small world after all.

There is just one moon and one golden sun,
And a smile means welcome wherever you are.
Though the oceans are wide and the mountains divide,

It's a small world after all.

It is a world of laughter, a world of joy
and a world of fears.

There is so much that we share,

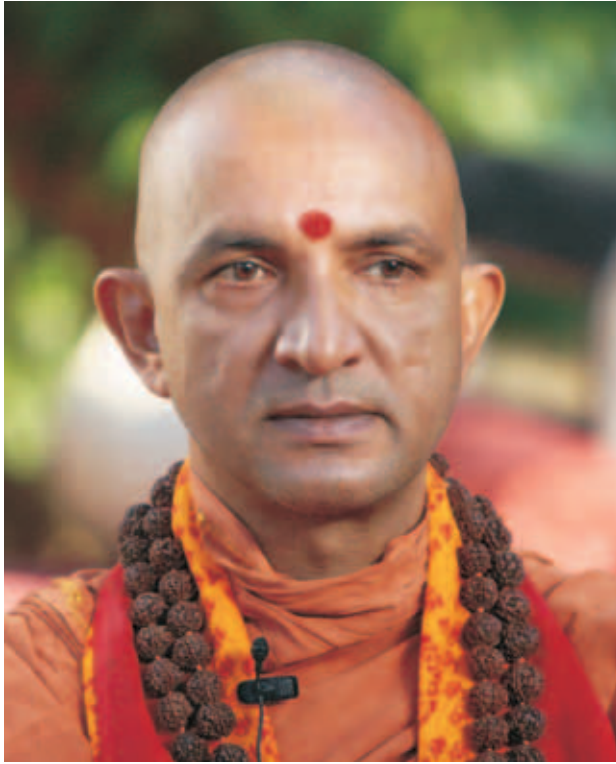
It's time we became aware
That it is a small world after all.



Swami Satyananda performed the panchagni sadhana, a very difficult penance from the vedic times. Could you please comment on this, as well as saying something about the fact that your lineage seems to revive the ancient tradition of yajna as described in the Vedas.

Our guru, Swami Satyananda, has performed one of the most difficult sadhanas prescribed for the paramahansa sannyasins. There are many other sadhanas and penances in this tradition that have been prescribed for people who follow this path. Throughout history people have performed these different sadhanas and penances

without which it is not possible to experience inner purity. Gold has to be melted in the fire to bring out the pure gold and remove its impurities. In the same way, through these different sadhanas, transformations take place in our personality, as the dross of material and sensorial attachments gradually subside and diminish. Paramahamsaji has performed many other sadhanas, not only the panchagni. However, people remember the panchagni as they were the witness of this sadhana, which lasted for nine years. Therefore, the memories of the panchagni are vivid in the mind. There is definitely a



connection with the all-pervasive consciousness after one has undergone these different high penances. Illuminated people throughout history have performed penances. Without penance, or breaking the conditionings of life, the new self does not emerge. When you plant a seed in the ground, in the course of time, the hard shell has to break in order for it to sprout. The seed has to die before it can give birth to a new sprout. In the same way, the self-oriented perceptions of consciousness also have to die first before the birth of the transcendental awareness can take place. These sadhanas are restricted and limited only to paramahansa sannyasins, as they are the people who are able to maintain the sanity of mind in times of crises.

When we confront different tendencies of the mind, it is very difficult to keep a balance. That is our situation. We feel destroyed and shattered by the intensity of pain and suffering. What happens when one comes face to face with the building blocks of life such as samskaras, instincts, memories, attachments or associations? To be free from their influence is not easy and it requires a very aware and strong mind with willpower. Finding that balance is the secret to life. It is like when you water-ski, you have to keep your balance, otherwise you fall into the water. Paramahamsaji is one of those rare people who embarked on this difficult sadhana and his teachings have been twofold. His first teaching was yoga for personal development and growth, and his second teaching is yajna for connection with the environment, nature, the cosmos and people. I see these two as the main teachings of our tradition.

The word 'yajna' does not mean a ritual or a fire ceremony. The literal meaning of yajna is production, distribution and enjoyment. This is the meaning of the three syllables ya, ja, na. Yajna presents that aspect of our connection with nature that nourishes life. Socially, what you produce is what you distribute and that is what people enjoy. Whether it is grains and food, or an idea, a feeling or a thought, the act of yajna is that from which people derive the maximum fulfilment, happiness and nourishment. Keeping these three things in mind: production, distribution and enjoyment, the system of yajna evolved to bring a social and spiritual unity in people. Therefore, tradition says yajna is a celebration of life, nature, creation and God.

Those of you who have been to the Sat Chandi Mahayajnas in India over the years have seen what the components of yajna are. Mantras are part of yajna. Their sound vibrations create a power that brings

about a positive change in our life. It transforms our perception, consciousness, and energies for the better. Another component of yajna is the act of giving, which represents the concept of distribution and enjoyment. A third part of yajna is the invocation of a specific energy. This is essential, as each yajna has a different purpose. It creates a different effect and has a different outcome.

The yajnas that Paramahamsaji is teaching us are the connection with the cosmic creative power. It is the nurturing, sustaining and creative force of the universe. This also awakens the shakti, the strength within us. Feminine qualities are the most cherished qualities in life. Even in God we look for love and compassion, sympathy and affection. Everybody wishes to have the experience of God as the nurturing force of life. We don't see God as somebody who is strict and domineering. Religious ideologies can give an impression of a firm, strict, disciplinarian God, but in personal aspiration we all look for a connection which is based on compassion, love, affection and kindness. All of us are looking for the soft qualities in God, not the hard ones. It is the soft quality of God which is the most beautiful, a compassionate and all-encompassing nature of the divine. This softness is the manifestation of energy, of Shakti. Shakti can be very strong, but at the same time it has softness in it. Yajna has been the invocation of that cosmic power to bring about identification with peace, prosperity and wellbeing in our life. The yajnas also provide an opportunity to connect us with our strength and to know that in spirit we are all part of the same universal energy. Therefore, yoga and yajna have been the two important gifts that Paramahamsaji has given to all of us. Yoga represents the inner connection and yajna represents the outer connection. It is a balance between the esoteric and exoteric in life.

Q. In your tradition is there any difference between the teachings given to women and men?

Swamiji: There is no difference between the teachings given to men and those given to women, for yoga practices are universal in nature. Yoga philosophy does not look at the human body in the form of male and female, but as human beings having the same creative potential. Therefore, there is no difference in the teachings. Over the last forty years of yoga in the world, it has definitely been noticed that women are more sensitive to connecting with their inner spirit and their inner nature. It is easier for them to express and connect with the soft sentiments in life than men. They grow and mature faster in spiritual life, therefore our tradition has always encouraged females to

develop their own potential to the maximum. It has also taught males to keep on walking without stopping, as they have a tendency to stop in every tavern that they see along the road.

Guru-disciple relationship

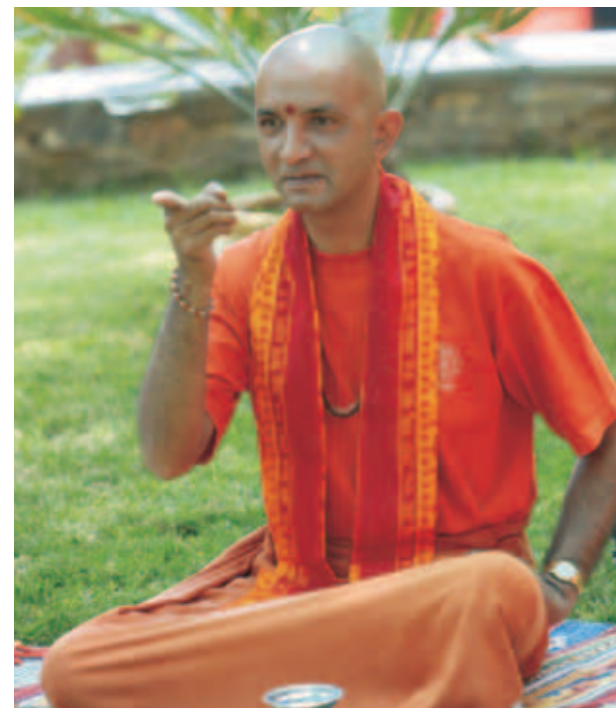
Q. Swami Satyananda is your guru, can you tell us about your relationship with him? What is your connection with Swami Satyananda?

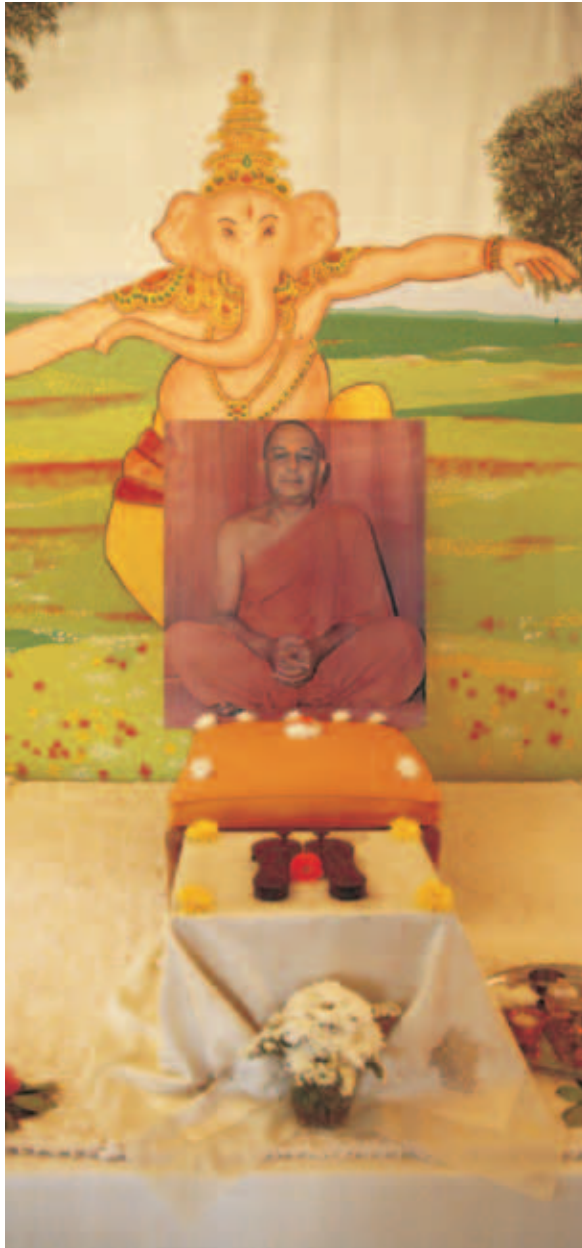
Swamiji: It is a very personal question and I don't know how to answer it. When you ask two people who are in love with each other what the other person is like, what is your reply? What do you feel for that other person? It's maybe just four words, "I love that person." That

defines everything and that is the feeling I have for my guru. That's my relationship with him. I love that person!

Q. Is a living guru necessary in one's life?

Swamiji: Definitely. Life is for the living. We can be inspired by dead gurus, no doubt about it, but we need the presence of the living guru to connect us with the teachings of the expired guru. It is just like in society where all the books from the first class right up to college are available. So why do you have to go to school and find yourself a teacher when you can simply read the books? Why do you need a living presence to tell you what to do, what to understand, what to write, or what to read? Trying to learn without a teacher is a lopsided idea in life, as well as in spiritual life.





Spiritual life has to be lived as you would live social life. For example, you cannot marry Marilyn Monroe. You have to marry somebody who is in front of you. If someone thinks marriage is not necessary as in his mind he is married to Marilyn Monroe, I don't see any solution for that person. To encourage, guide and educate you, you need the presence of a living master. Dead masters can't correct you if you're going in the wrong direction. It is also not their problem. They can't even correct your interpretation of their own ideas. You know the English expression, "Be compassionate"? Once I was lecturing and I said to the audience, "Be compassionate", and everyone understood "Become passionate." Luckily, I was alive to correct them. Now just imagine the problem if instead of becoming compassionate they would all become passionate!

God and the new stars

Two questions from one of the younger girls in the ashram here. The first question is: What is God? Also she has heard that there is some talk about some new stars, which have appeared in the sky and she wants Swamiji to speak more about those. Then she also wants to know what your favourite star is.

What is God? A very difficult question. I don't have the answer. The only thing I know is that God is beauty, God is something very auspicious, God is Truth. However, I don't have an experience of it. Perhaps when you are older and I have some more maturity and wisdom I can tell you. Today I am only a seeker and I don't have the answer. From the letter 'G' I can infer that it stands for generation, creation. 'O' stands for organization, maintenance and nurturing, and 'D' stands for destruction, transformation and change. Therefore, my understanding is that God is something which has these three abilities of generation, organization and destruction. But this is an intellectual understanding. When it becomes a real understanding, I will let you know. It is, however, possible to feel

the presence of God. When you see a leaf, the greenness of that leaf is God. When you see a rock, the hardness of that rock is God. When you are thirsty and you drink water, the satisfaction is God. When you haven't eaten for many days and are hungry, that hunger is God. When you are experiencing love and nothing else exists, that love is God. God is each and every experience of life. Therefore, be receptive to every experience. With conviction in oneself and faith in God, who knows, maybe you will discover God before me and if so, let me know.

As for which star I like the most, I like the North Star very much, because whenever you look at the North Star from anywhere in the world, you'll always know you are looking in the right direction. Secondly, I like another star in the constellation of Capricorn. The name of that star is Swami Satyananda Saraswati. This is all official, by the way, and perhaps next month, we will publish in the Yoga magazine the map and the star which has officially been named Swami Satyananda Saraswati. So, whenever you need to be inspired by Paramahamsaji, look up to that star. Then there is another star in the constellation of Virgo, which is called Swami Sivananda, and this is also official. Look at that star and you will be inspired. The wisdom and the wholeness of that star will enlighten your life. It is these two stars which are the inspiring ones in my life, apart from the North Star, because whenever I look up at the sky and I see these three stars I know that the teachings of our masters are always there illuminating our path. There is also another star in the constellation of Aquarius. It is a very tiny star, and it is called Swami Niranjan Saraswati. If you happen to identify it, say your good prayers. The constellation of Aquarius is on the opposite side of the other two, which are almost side by side. It is a bit lonely out there in cold dark space, so say your prayers and this will send it warmth and encouragement to await its time.

I don't know if you are aware of another thing that happened last year: one hectare of land was acquired on the moon. If everything goes well, we shall have the first extraterrestrial Satyananda Yoga Ashram there. All this has happened not because we have done it, but because of people who are connected with Paramahamsaji, with Swami Sivananda and the teachings that have flowed down the lineage. People from Canada registered the land on the moon for the Satyananda Yoga Ashram and the well-wishers and devotees from Slovenia have registered the three stars. Each country is trying to recognize the contribution of Swami Sivananda and Swami Satyananda in a form that can be inspiring and remembered by all. The Slovenian people say that whenever you are in need of inspiration, look up to the three stars in the sky. So, twinkle, twinkle little star, how I wonder what you are?

Tantra

Swami Sivamurti: There are so many questions here from all of you that there will not be time to have them all answered. Nevertheless, it is my experience with Swamiji that we will receive the answers that we need, despite the question being asked by somebody else. Somehow the answer comes for us. I have found this out in Rikhia and Munger. Sometimes when there has been a very important question in my heart or on my mind and I haven't had the opportunity to ask it directly, the answer has come. It happens when you are in the presence of guru.

Q. It is said that the mahayajnas summarize the teachings of Vedanta. Are there any such statements that sum up the teachings of tantra in a nutshell? If not, could you do it for us? In the West the word tantra has got a sexual connotation, what do you think of this phenomenon?

Swamiji: To begin with, you have to understand the meaning of the word tantra. It means expansion and liberation.

Expansion is the expansion of consciousness, liberation is the liberation or freeing of the energies. Consciousness and energy, the experience of these two eternal principles, has been the main theme of tantra. Yoga is the sadhana aspect or the practical aspect of tantra. Tantra is the philosophy and yoga is the process, the means, or the practice by which you can experience this life-changing philosophy. The statements of the Vedas are indications of a unity of consciousness with the higher Self. One of the statements of the Vedas is, "I am that." "I am that higher consciousness" is another statement. "You are that highest consciousness" is yet another statement. Another still is, "The knower is that highest consciousness." All these vedic

statements represent the same idea, which indicates a unity of the individual consciousness with the transcendental consciousness or "Me and my father are one." Tantra has the opposite belief. It works with energy and the expression of energy. Four things happen with the awakening of the energy: we develop right conduct in life, we develop appropriate thinking in life, we perform appropriate actions in life, and we follow the appropriate dharma to uplift us in life. Realization of unity is the culmination of Vedanta, while living the appropriate life is the culmination of tantra. These are also the four statements of the tantras: appropriate living, appropriate thinking, appropriate behaviour, and adhering to the appropriate dharma.



About the sexual aspect of tantra, western tantrics believe in it, not eastern tantrics. The western tantrics apply the word tantra to their sexual act to increase and enlarge the moments of pleasure, while the eastern tantrics observe sexuality as an instinct which has to be transcended and sublimated. Unfortunately, sublimation does not sell and sex does. So the western tantrics are taken in by that aspect of tantra. There are so many different tantras that have come on to the market, we have Indian tantra, Chinese tantra, Taoist tantra. Eastern tantrics and Indian tantrics see tantra as a way of managing the four basic instincts. These are the instincts of maithuna, sexuality; bhaya, fear; ahara, craving and desire; and nidra, disconnection, cutting off and isolation.

If we look at nidra, the vritti of sleep, it is an instinct which disconnects the senses from the outer world and gives us relaxation. If one did not sleep, it would be very difficult to survive on a day-to-day basis, as the senses and the brain would be overloaded. When the pressure builds up, sleep comes in as an antidote to counter that stress pressure. To be able to relax is a matter of instinct, but our way of relaxing is changing and we do not now know how to relax. If you collect all the tranquillizers in the world and put them in a room and if you collect all the other medicines, for the head or the stomach, and put them in another room, the number of sleeping pills and tranquillizers will be much more than all the other pills combined. This is an indication of how people are losing their ability to sleep. In order to sleep, they have to resort to an artificial means. Sleep is an instinct which is necessary for the survival of life, but one has to regulate that through awareness and sadhana. The same happens with desires and expectations, attachments and wants. Desire is always pregnant. Before desire dies, it gives birth to another one and so it is always producing more and



more of desire's children. There is no end to these desires, but you have to know what is appropriate for you. You may want anything in life, but do you really need it? One has to extract oneself from the force and attraction of desires in order to experience peace and tranquillity.

Management of desires can happen through meditation and reflection. The same applies to fears and insecurities. What is the biggest fear in our life? Becoming uprooted from our area of comfort. It is our associations in the world that represent our zones of comfort, that is, our husband, wife, children, society, friends and clubs. All these represent our areas of involvement where we find comfort and some connection. Fear always follows change. Fear is an indication of you trying to hold on to

your comfort zone, and not letting it go. This is something one has to recognize and manage in life also, by putting in place proper systems of meditation and reflection.

Sexuality is the fourth instinct. The need to continue with the lineage is natural. The need to propagate life is also natural. Even in nature, plants have that need and they propagate further growth. Animals and insects have that need, but they follow the laws of nature. Human beings have that need, but they don't follow the laws of nature; they follow the law of their own pleasure. We don't have to look far to see the negative results of these thoughts or actions. Tantra says that there are three purposes to sexuality: pleasure, progeny and sublimation. The majority of people are stuck in the pleasure zone, a good number of people move from the pleasure zone into the progeny zone, in the course of time, and then they move back into the pleasure zone. Sometimes they move back into the progeny zone eight or nine times, and again have many years in the pleasure zone, but there is no inclination for the sublimation zone.

The western tantrics have exploited the pleasure zone, and the eastern tantrics are teaching the sublimation zone. That's why we don't get many tantrics in India, as it is all sublimation. There are more tantrics in the West, as it is all pleasure. However, in the real sense, tantra seeks the sublimation of the gross energies and reversal of the life forces from being wasted to being uplifted and raised. That can only happen when you have learned how to control your passions. The western books extol the glories of expressing the passion and the eastern books deal with the sublimation of consciousness and energy. I feel that eventually, as people become more and more enlightened and aware, they will look more into the aspect of sublimation as it will give a greater sense of fulfilment, direction and purpose in life.

Latest developments in the Satyananda Yoga tradition in India

Q. What is happening in India now?

Swamiji: I don't know what is happening now as I have been away for the last fifteen days, but I'd like to tell you what is going to happen this year. This year we are having the Sat Chandi Mahayajna. The Rajasooya Yajna is finished. It was the sankalpa of Paramahamsaji for twelve years. The chapter of the Rajasooya Yajna is complete, over and done with. Now Sat Chandi Mahayajna will be an ongoing activity for Rikhiapeeth, for Rikhiapeeth is the place of Shakti. Swami Satyananda appointed Swami Satsangi to be the first acharya of Rikhiapeeth on 1st January 2007, and the discovery of Shakti within and without is the purpose of Rikhiapeeth. So, this year we will have the Chandi Yajna, then we shall be celebrating Yoga Poornima, the full moon in December, as the official birthday of our guru, Swami Satyananda.

Swami Satyananda was born on a full moon day in 1923 in the month of December, which in 1923 fell on 24th December and in 2008 falls on 12th December. According to the solar calendar, Paramahamsaji's birthday is shared by Jesus, and according to the lunar calendar it falls on every full moon of December. Paramahamsaji has decided that it is not the fixed date of the solar calendar that we will follow, but the full moon date of the lunar calendar. Therefore, from 8th December to 12th December there will be a special havan of Shiva. During this period, we shall have the Shakti Yajna as well as Shiva Yajna. Then, on the 12th, his birthday will be celebrated.

After that, he has given us the aim to feed all the children of the area with at least one square meal per day. Hectic arrangements are being made to prepare for this sankalpa. A huge kitchen where food can be prepared for five to six thousand children and a huge storeroom where



we can store supplies to feed that many people for at least a week will be built. Hopefully, we shall be able to start this project after the Yoga Poornima celebrations. In this way, a lot of preparations are underway in Rikhia.

Munger is also working tirelessly to develop the subject of yoga. Right now, some very good work is taking place there. An encyclopaedia of yoga is being compiled. Very soon you will have ten volumes on hatha yoga, twenty volumes on bhakti yoga and fifteen volumes on raja yoga. They will cover all the aspects and teachings given throughout the ages until the present time on these subjects. This is very intensive and involved work. Many people have come from all over the world to spend a month or two in Munger to help on this project.

Rikhia and Munger are your second home, you are welcome any time. They represent the two places of pilgrimage for the yoga aspirant. Rikhia allows you to discover

the harmony, unity and diversity, and Munger allows you to explore and connect with your inner self. Greece is the place that allows you to talk about what you have received. Thus, you are connected to three places: Paiania, Rikhia and Munger. This is what is happening at present in India.

—Satsang at Satyanandashram Hellas,
28 and 29 May 2008

The Four Stages of Satyananda Yoga

Let us see the four classifications of Satyananda Yoga. The first classification is: yoga practice, the second: yoga sadhana, the third: yogic lifestyle, and the fourth: yogic culture. There is a link between all these four stages. Practice has to evolve into sadhana, sadhana has to evolve into lifestyle, and lifestyle has to evolve into culture.

Yoga practice is for us to fulfil our own needs and aspirations. However, when you follow the aims set down by yoga, then it becomes yoga sadhana, for example, how to become disciplined. This is the first aim of yoga as described by Patanjali. The second aim is management of our mental behaviour, chitta vritti nirodhah; the third aim defined by yoga is to become the observer of the life processes and the behaviours and expressions.

Once we experience or attain or acquire even one of the aims of yoga, then it becomes a lifestyle. When yoga is fully incorporated in the lifestyle and we have gone some way towards fulfilling the three goals set down by yoga, then we move into yoga culture.

—Swami Niranjanananda

Impressions

Discipleship

Swami Sivamurti

During the Ram Naam Aradhana, sometime in the early nineties, during the Sita Kalyanam festivities, I remember Paramahamsaji said that if ever the role of being a guru clashed with that of being a sannyasin, he would choose that of the sannyasin. His chief disciple, Swami Niranjan, at that time, never used the seat assigned to him beside his guru, but used to sit unobtrusively on the steps nearby. This quiet gesture of Swami Niranjan speaks far more effectively than any discourse on the guru-disciple relationship. Through his demeanour we see Swami Niranjan, a guru in his own right, placing his role as a sannyasin first, before us all, with a quiet but piercing clarity.

There is a grace in the way Swami Niranjan greets and introduces the speakers that shows in his deft movements and ensures no awkward moments arise during the program. He is alert, always ready to take care of a guest of Paramahamsaji. Before us is the example of one who is able to balance all the varied occurrences that demand the attention of a master of ceremonies, from the needs of the eminent spiritual leaders to those of the akhara workers. He moves through the events like a top spinning on a wire; nothing must fall down, or be out of place. He maintains the harmony; he keeps it all in perfect balance.



Infinity in his eyes

Swami Aparokshananda describes his feelings for Swami Niranjan.

It is said that the eyes reflect the soul and the heart, clear of any emotions or impressions that may overshadow them. The spark in such a look creates an inner bond and understanding, beyond words and gestures. Words of wisdom come only to convey or to confirm the look passed between two pairs of eyes looking into the depths of each other. To me Swami Niranjan is 'The Man' with infinity behind his eyes.

A living example of faith

Swami Agnidevi describes an incident with Swami Niranjan that took place during Tyag Yoga Jubilee celebrations at Munger in 1993.

In 1993, we went to Munger to participate in the celebrations of the fifty-year jubilee of our beloved Paramahamsaji's Sannyasa Day. At the peak of the celebrations, a strong wind and torrential rain storm suddenly broke out. The tents were almost ready to collapse under the heavy rain and there was panic in the air. It was a big test of faith for us and the thousands

of participants there. While the rain was pouring all around him, I looked at Swami Niranjan on stage, without a trace of discomfort or worry, chanting Om Namah Shivaya with a steady voice and asking us to joint in the chanting with him. A feeling of security and safety filled our hearts.

During the night, hundreds of disciples and devotees worked to restore the tents and the following morning everything continued according to schedule.

Four different instructions

Swami Dharmaratna tells of her seva yoga experience and how it helped her view things in an entirely different light.

I was in Rikhia for karma yoga well before the Sat Chandi Mahayajna. This was a great way for me to be close to the gurus and receive the most important lessons in a very subtle, unexpected and effective way. The requirements for the preparations were many, however, some among them were more relaxing, like washing the little clay cups.



On the first day, after we had all gathered, Swami Niranjan came and gave us detailed instructions on how to clean the cups. He showed us how to plunge the cups into the water and then clean them by rubbing them with our fingers. After a while our fingers turned red and became very sensitive. Still, we continued to work in the same way, as an important part of karma yoga is to follow instructions.

The following day, Swami Niranjan came and gave us a different instruction. He told us to plunge the cups into the water and then use a small piece of cloth to clean them and then let them dry.

On the third day, Swami Niranjan was accompanying Paramahamsaji, who often used to take a walk around to see how things were going. He was in a playful mood that day and in complete control of everything happening around him. From time to time he stopped and talked to different disciples, he welcomed others, made remarks, gave instructions, accepted the manifestations of love from disciples with a detached air and urged us to continue with our karma yoga. At

some point, he approached our group, watched us for a while and then told us that we didn't have to use a cloth to clean the cups, but we only had to plunge them into the water three times and then let them dry before we put them back into the baskets.

On the fourth day, Swami Niranjan came again, together with Paramahamsaji, who looked at us in a somewhat serious manner and said, "Don't plunge those cups into the water three times. They are not well baked and they can break. You have to plunge them in only once and then dry them."

Some of us were frustrated, some made comments, others got upset and none of us understood why we were doing all this. Over four days, we had four different instructions for such a simple thing!

After a while, I started noticing that it was hard for me to plunge each cup only once. When my mind was dispersed, my hand unconsciously plunged the cup into the water three or more times. So, I had to remain alert and not lose control.

Later on, I realized that the meaning behind these apparently contradictory instructions was to develop



awareness, to focus on what we do, to observe our reactions in the body and the mind, to let go of fixed ways of acting and develop flexibility, to disentangle from “I know” and “I do” and many other things. In this way, even the simplest form of action can become an amazing form of meditation and a tool for spiritual evolution.

Getting to know Swamiji is like dubbing perfection
Swami Vedavyasananda describes her impressions of Swami Niranjan.

During my travels to India over the years, I had the opportunity to meet Swami Niranjan and catch a glimpse of who he is, when he allowed it. As I reflect on my meetings and my relationship with Swami Niranjan, I recall precious moments which are stored up inside me like a treasure.

It was a time when he had both the administrative and the spiritual roles, and he was travelling as well, so he was very busy. For a period of time, I watched him



from a distance. I was dazzled by his eloquence and his clear-sightedness. Over the years, during the different visits to India, when I shyly approached him, I saw that side-by-side with the powerful guru, was a man of feeling; gentle, considerate, kind and thoughtful.

This is one of the experiences I had with him which I feel is time to share. It was December 2003, during our annual visits to Ganga Darshan, after Sita Kalyanam at Rikhia. The weather had turned cold and I had caught a cold. For some days I dragged myself up and down the building and around the ashram, without letting anyone know about my condition, hoping that it would go away by itself. One night it got worse, my whole body shivered and ached with a fever. I can still recall that difficult night and the helplessness I felt, unable to find any relief. After hours of suffering, I managed to sleep and it was then that I felt Swami Niranjan's presence in the room. He was standing right behind my head; he raised his right hand and he placed it on my back. His hand was so warm and powerful that my body was raised into the air, above the bed; for a couple of minutes I was up in the air, weightless, while his hand

drew out all the pain and tension from my body. When he removed his hand, my body regained its weight and fell abruptly back on to the mattress. After this I woke up with a feeling of lightness, coolness and sweetness. The pain and illness had gone. I felt immense gratitude. This experience is still with me as vivid as then.

Although I know the power of guru and the spirit that he represents, I am mostly touched by the very special and unique way that purity of feeling and one-pointed determination are combined in him. And how he has such sensitivity and humbleness together with a unique straight-forwardness. It was not difficult for Swami Niranjan, the sannyasin, and the man, to win my heart, as well as the hearts of all his other disciples throughout the world. It was only a matter of time.

The wave of love

Sannyasi Atmachintan describes his experience with Swami Niranjan during his 2008 visit to the ashram.

During Swami Niranjan's last visit to the ashram in Paiania, Greece, I was on gate duty to receive and welcome the visitors. I was assigned fulltime at the



gate for the whole duration of the program, since somebody had to do it, and was unable to attend any of the programs with Swami Niranjan.

On the last day, when Swami Niranjan was walking out of the ashram, with all the visitors and residents waving and singing to him, from either side of the driveway, he passed by me. At that moment I was standing exactly under the ashram gate. He looked at me and sent me a kind “wave of love” with his very special and warm smile. I am sure that he knew what my duty was and with this special contact he wanted to compensate for my having been ‘stuck’ at the gate all those days. I told him, “Goodbye and thanks”, and again this wave of love came upon me together with that amazing smile of his. What an experience!

An overview of Swami Niranjan’s visits

Sannyasi Poornananda gives her overall impression of Swami Niranjan’s visits to the ashram.

Throughout his visits during the years 2000, 2005, 2008, I remember two things very vividly. On the one hand, the struggles, the challenges, the hardships before his visit culminating in a joyful feeling of enthusiasm, contentment and accomplishment with Swami Niranjan’s visit in the ashram. On the other hand, the sweetness, the upliftment, the feeling of unity after his visit.

Each time he visited a metamorphosis took place. The way I perceive it, it was as if some masks dropped away each time and I felt more comfortable with myself, the way it is natural for me to be.



Chronicles

In 2008, Swami Niranjan visited Greece, arriving from Hungary. This was his fourth visit to the Greek ashram and it was for two days (28–29 May).

His program in Greece was only confirmed a few weeks before his arrival. Until then his visit was just a fervent wish, although we hadn't slacked pace in an effort to be ready, as we were always hoping! When the official announcement came, Swami Sivamurti ensured that preparations for Swamiji's arrival stepped up a few gears, with new buildings in the orange grove area, and renovations in the interior and exterior areas of the ashram.

Despite the very short notice and the program's mid-week dates, Swami Niranjan's presence drew approximately five hundred people from Greece and other countries such as Argentina, Colombia, Germany, India, Italy, Slovenia, Spain, United Kingdom and others, to the ashram.

Swami Anandananda (Italy), Swami Vishwashakti (Slovenia) and Swami Pragyamurti (United Kingdom) accompanied Swami Niranjan on his visit to Greece.

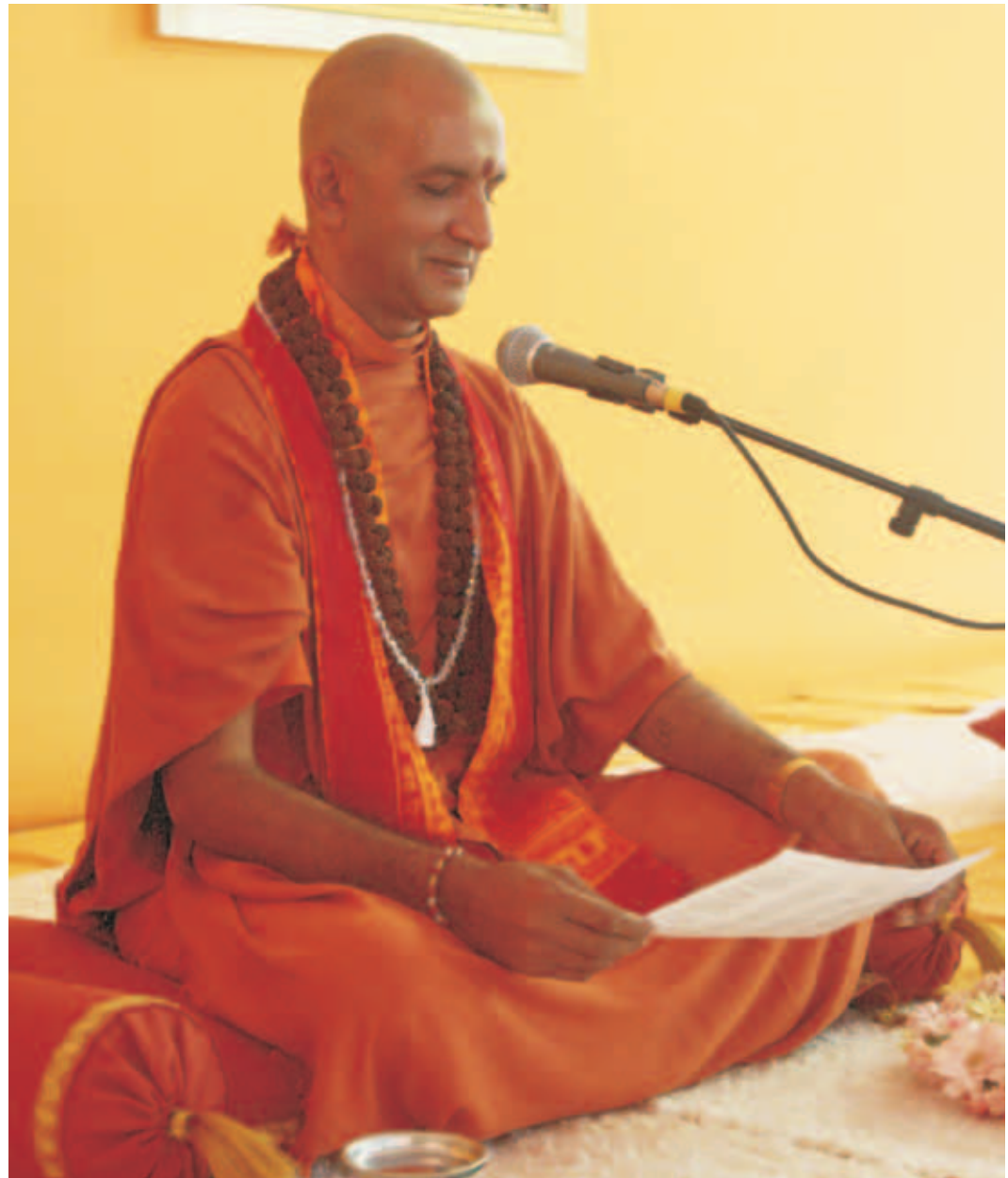
During his stay, he gave lectures and satsangs for the 'Living Yoga' seminar (27–29 May), organized by Satyanandashram Hellas.

On the evening of 28 May, Greek karma sannyasins presented an extract of Plato's The Symposium as a play. This extract focused on Socrates' view of love, as spoken by his teacher Diotima. It refers to the idyllic form of love, beyond the erotic form, that covers all aspects of a person's personality, and then extends further to unconditionally loving all people, all objects, all ideas, all activities, and everything in the manifest universe.

On 29 May, Swami Niranjan initiated 21 people into mantra, 9 into spiritual name, 22 into jignasu sannyasa, and 29 into karma sannyasa.

His presence and programs in Greece were a joyous and inspiring occasion, not only for the ashram and its residents, but for all seekers and the public at large. In closing, he said that he would come back to Greece soon for a much longer stay!

Later in the day, Swami Niranjan left for Bulgaria, to commence his next series of programs. A number of Greek disciples, who were not ready to say goodbye, accompanied him.



The lectures and satsangs given by Swami Niranjan during his 2008 visit were compiled into a booklet: Living Yoga, and published by Satyanandashram Hellas.

Following Swami Niranjan's most recent visit, the Satyananda Yoga movement in Greece received a new boost and continues to grow and develop. Particular emphasis has been given to our support of Sivananda Math, and to publishing, translating and distributing, throughout Greece, the immense wealth of knowledge within the Satyananda Yoga books.

Another colourful item, included in all of Swami Niranjan's visits to Satyanandashram Hellas, is the theme song. Every time he visited, the residents of the ashram had a theme song prepared for him, which they sung on various occasions during his stay and upon his arrival. These theme songs were: 'We are the world' during his 2000 visit; 'When Sivananda-Satyananda-Niranjanananda shines on me' during his 2005 visit; and the 'Yes song' during his last visit in 2008. Each of these theme songs has captured the essence, the message, and the mood of his visit.

All through the years, since Satyanandashram Hellas was founded in 1979, and until the present time, groups of disciples from Greece visit India. The first group travelled to the old Bihar School of Yoga, Munger, in 1981. Since then, groups from the Greek ashram continue to visit and stay for periods of time in the ashrams at Rikhia and Munger, to receive the darshan of the gurus of our tradition, and to reconnect with the source. This exchange of visits, between India and Greece, which has continued for decades, strengthens our direction and inspiration to contribute to our guru's mission: "to carry the message of yoga from shore to shore and from door to door."



God is beyond speech. God is beyond mind. God who is formless. God who is nameless. God who has no particular place. God who has no denomination. God who is as big as the cosmos and smaller than the atom. Such a funny God man has discovered.

Satsang

Q. How can Yoga practices help in the twentieth century?

Paramahamsaji: I would suggest that we first find out what our needs are. What are our strengths? What are our weaknesses? What are our ambitions? After discovering your strengths, weaknesses, ambitions and needs, which is by the way, the "SWAN" theory: strength = S, weakness = W, ambition = A, need = N, try to use the practices which can help you develop your strength, overcome your weakness and clear your mind so that you have a better direction in life. Use practices which will help you fulfill the immediate needs of the body and personality. This might be a combination of just a few asana and a few pranayama, or it might be a combination of ten atomic yogic bombs. You know, it all depends on an individual and on their "SWAN".

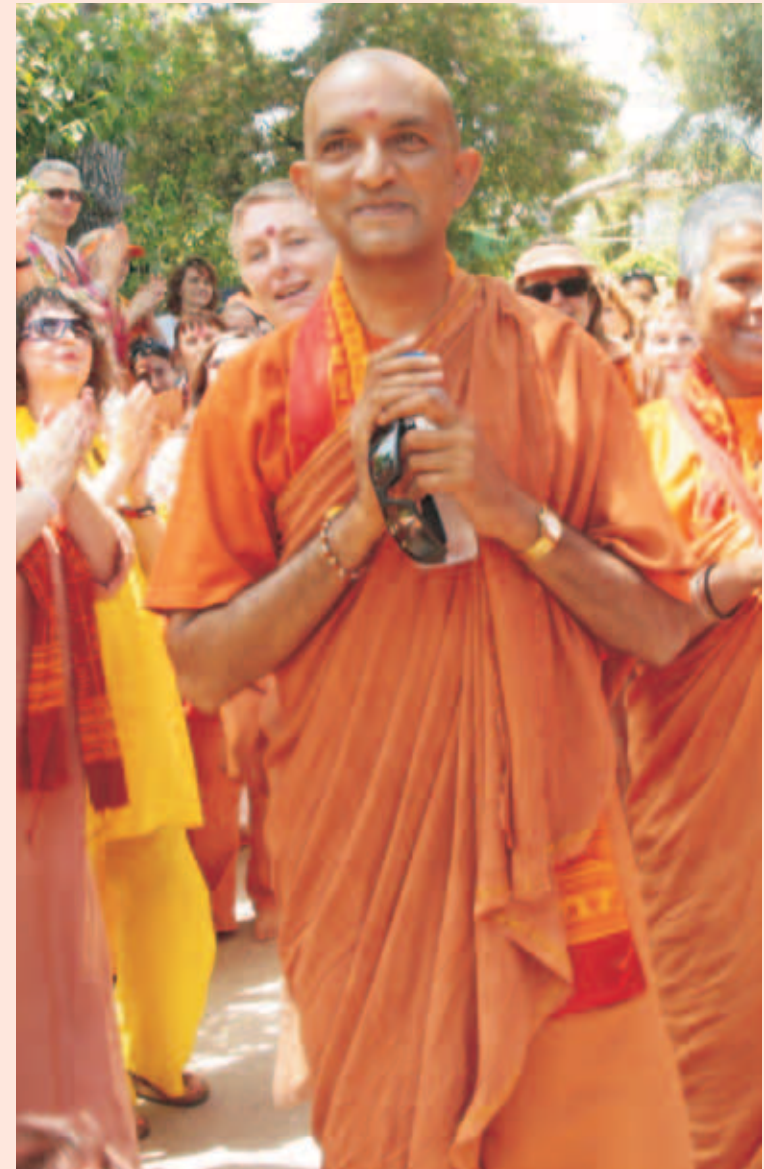
(Extract from © Bihar School of Yoga, originally published in "On the Wings of the Swan Part I, Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati, page 115")

Q. Can you define sadhana?

Paramahamsaji: The general concept of sadhana is that one practices something for an extended period of time in order to achieve a particular end or goal. There are many types of sadhana. In the Indian tradition three types of sadhana are recognized. The first is Vedic sadhana, the second is yogic sadhana and the third is tantric sadhana.

(Extract from © Bihar School of Yoga, originally published in "On the Wings of the Swan Part I, Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati, page 125")

Swami Niranjan's departure from Satyanandashram Hellas, Monday 6 June 2008





History of Satyanandasram Hellas 2000 – 2010

The history of Satyananda Yoga in Greece and the Greek ashram started back in 1976. Our story through the years from 1976 to 1999 has been told in the first volume, with Swami Satyananda's visits to Greece.

2000

Swami Niranjanananda visits Greece for the second time in 2000

A new chapter in the history of the ashram started with the turn of the century, commencing with Swami Niranjan's second visit to Greece in 2000, after twenty-one years. What was previously known as Satyanandashram Greece, was now called Satyanandashram Hellas, 'Hellas' being the Greek name for the nation.

The spirit, which united Greece and India once, is still vibrant and still continues to unite the people of both countries. When I came to Greece I felt that spirit very deeply in myself. It was like coming to my second home. Although I have come back after a gap of twenty years, I wish to return to Greece again in the near future. In the meantime, I wish to simply tell you one final thing: just

let us all open our hearts, open our minds and enjoy the beauty and growth that life can bring us. This is not only a hope or a wish; rather, it can be achieved when the cultures and people of the two countries unite in yoga.

—Swami Niranjanananda

The outstanding highlight of 2000 was Swami Niranjanananda's second visit to Greece (following his visit to France where he was a guest of the Research of Yoga in Education (RYE) Congress in Paris supported by UNESCO).

Swami Niranjanananda presided over two main events hosted in the ashram: a two-day program, The Application of Yoga in Drug and Alcohol Rehabilitation, organized by the European Yoga Fellowship (EYF), and a series of three programs organized by Satyanandashram Hellas. These programs included the first Sannyasa Festival, with programs and festivities focusing on the ideals of sannyasa and the role of sannyasa in the 21st century. The second was a Celebration with the Guru, a day to receive the guru's darshan and initiation, and the third program was Yoga Day, with yoga activities specifically orientated towards newcomers.



During his lectures on sannyasa, Swami Niranjanananda said: "The Sannyasa Festival, which, in my opinion, we are celebrating for the first time outside India, represents an attempt to understand this concept of developing the pure inner nature, full of wisdom, full of understanding, full of compassion and full of love. There have been many yoga events, seminars and conferences in the past, but never a seminar which dealt only and specifically with sannyasa. It is appropriate that we are thinking about this process of attaining inner purity in Greece, a civilization which gave great thinkers and philosophers to the world, and that has helped shape the mentality of people, and made them aware of another dimension in life."

During A Celebration with the Guru, initiations were given and a sacred vedic ceremony, conducted by Swami Paramananda (from Omkarananda Ashram, Austria) and other pujaris, took place. Swami Paramananda also conducted the Guru Paduka Pooja, in honour of Swami Satyananda, later that day. Almost 200 aspirants were initiated by Swami Niranjanananda: 12 into poorna sannyasa (Swami Agnidevi, Swami Amritsagar, Swami Dharmaratna, Swami Harishakti, Swami Ishananda, Swami Karmayogi, Swami Karunaratna, Swami Shambhujyoti, Swami Satyaprakash, Swami Savitananda, Swami Suryamitra, and Swami Vairagyaratna); 68 into karma sannyasa; 53 into jignasu sannyasa; and 60 into mantra and spiritual name.

A Cosmic Mass was celebrated by the Rev. Antoinette Schoenmaker from the Independent Church of Australia, together with Swami Niranjanananda, prior to the commencement of the Yoga Day, when the ashram opened its gates to the public and local neighbours.

Five hundred people from Greece and abroad attended the Paiania programs, including acharyas and sannyasins from abroad. Swami Anandananda (Italy), Swami

Prakashananda (Germany) and Swami Vedantananda (UK) also gave talks and seminars during these programs.

Besides the events at Paiania, Swami Niranjanananda delivered public lectures at the Ziridis College and the Goethe Institute in Athens. Some of the many sannyasins that visited from other countries included Swami Shrutigiana (Bulgaria), Swami Vivekamurti (Bulgaria), Sannyasi Achyutananda (UK), and Sannyasi Atmatattwa (UK).

During his time in Greece, Swami Niranjanananda also had the opportunity to carry out various meetings with international Satyananda Yoga organizations (EYF, RYE Greece, IYFM) and had several meetings to formally initiate a Satyananda Yoga Academy in Europe. He also put aside special time to see the children's group and the ashram residents.

Following his visit, Satyanandashram Hellas compiled all the material from his sannyasa programs into a book titled Sannyasa Festival, which was published in 2001. The EYF also published a book Festival of Yogic Life, with the complete material from its forum on yoga and addiction.

In response to Swami Niranjan's mandate to continue with the application of yoga in the field of addiction, Satyanandashram Hellas initiated a pilot residential program titled 'Overcoming Addiction Program', which continued until 2005, with very positive results. Together with the help of psychiatrists and other medical practitioners, a group of young adults were provided with a non-threatening and supportive environment to help them rehabilitate. The ashram has helped people manage various forms of addiction before, on an individual basis, but this was our first group project. Support was also extended to the young people's families and friends. Some of the people participating in the project later received initiation and became yoga teachers, and are now helping others with similar challenges in life.

Swami Sivamurti conducted programs on the SWAN principle at Volkings in Germany and Sofia in Bulgaria, and a seminar on Yoga in the New Millennium at Bankya in Bulgaria.

The ashram programs for 2000 included the annual Youth camps, Kriya Yoga and Tattwa Shuddhi, Health management courses, Navaratri, Sivaratri and Gurus' Initiation-day celebrations, two Sannyasa Training courses, Teacher Training and In-service Training courses (Swami Vedantananda from UK was guest speaker in the In-service course). Swami Paramananda (from Omkarananda Ashram, Austria) gave pooja training to some of the ashram residents. The very first pilot Yogic Studies 1 course started in September 2000 and finished in June of 2001. Every 11th of the month, the day was dedicated to Swami Niranjan and every 26th of the month, to Paramahamsaji.

At the ashram, Swami Sivamurti held weekly satsangs during the year and during Guru Poornima she conducted the seminar The Indweller of the Heart. Outside the ashram, Swami Sivamurti gave programs on Kundalini Yoga, Shakti (for women) and Bhakti Yoga at the various Satyananda yoga centres around Greece, and also the seminars Yoga for the Young and Yoga and Family in Chalkidiki, northern Greece, a wandering seminar in Mani, southern Greece, and a yogic renewal weekend on the island of Mitilini.

Swami Suryaprakash (Spain) visited the ashram, and participated in pooja training at the ashram, in the wandering seminar in Mani, as well as visiting the monasteries on Mount Athos.

Swami Sivamurti led a group to India to attend Sita Kalyanam at Rikhia and visit BSY, Munger, and accompanied Father Vissarion from Greece to conduct an Orthodox Mass at the Rikhia festivities that year.

2001–2004

Yoga is a system of thought, a philosophy, and a way of understanding, appreciating, and accepting life.

Yoga is a set of practices, which we can do to integrate the faculties and the qualities of body, mind, and emotions, and realize the qualities of spirit. Yoga is also a process of personal transformation, which leads to the improvement of the social and family environment.

—Swami Niranjanananda

Following Swami Niranjanananda's visit in 2000, the ashram continued to flourish, and an increased number of people attended the Paiania programs. Swami Sivamurti continued her schedule of talks and seminars, throughout these years, within Greece and abroad including Bulgaria (Borovitz, Sofia, Velingrad), Germany (Volkings), the Netherlands (Buitenkaag, Veldhoven), Poland (Krakow), Serbia (Belgrade), Spain (Barcelona, Mallorca), UK (Wales) and USA (Cleveland, Ohio).

Women's groups were formed in Athens, Kavala, Larissa, and Thessaloniki. These groups address women's issues related to yoga and assist with the projects of Satyananda Math and Sivananda Math.

In 2001, a Yogic Studies 1 course was supervised by Swami Sivamurti. Swami Satyadharma (India) visited us to assist with the contents and organization of the course and Swami Nischalananda (Wales) was a guest lecturer in the course. A seminar on Yoga and Addiction was held with seven specialists from the fields of physiotherapy, psychology, psychiatry, pathology, and general medicine, as well as yoga acharyas: Swami Anandananda (Italy), Swami Prakashananda (Germany), and Swami Satyadharma (India).

Regular ashram programs included two Sannyasa Training courses, two In-service Training Seminar (one in the summer with guest speaker Swami Vedantananda from UK, and one in the autumn which included assessments for yoga teachers, and assessors' training for a selected group of yoga teachers). Swami Paramananda (Austria) came again to give havan training to those ashram residents who had completed the pooja training the previous year. Special emphasis was also given to improving the ashram's organic farm and sowing natural seeds.

Swami Sivamurti went on a Balkan tour to Serbia and Bulgaria in April and accompanied Swami Niranjanananda to Barcelona, Spain, in May 2001. In June, she attended the seminar, Applications of Yoga in the New Millennium, at the Welsh ashram in the presence of Swami Niranjanananda. She was also a guest speaker and workshop facilitator for the Yoga, Women and Spirituality seminar in Germany in June. She visited Germany again in September to give a Yogic Lifestyle seminar at the Volkings Yoga Zentrum.

Swami Aparokshananda was invited to Israel to give talks and seminars on yoga. The annual trips to India for Guru Poornima, Sat Chandi Mahayajna, and Rajasooya Yajna continued to attract more and more Greek devotees.



Rishi Vivekananda lecturing at Satyananda Yoga Centre Thessaloniki

In 2002, Swami Sivamurti lectured and gave seminars on Connecting Yoga with the Goddesses of Greek Mythology, Yoga and the Psychology of Relationships, Yogic Lifestyle, and The SWAN Principle. A roundtable conference on Management of Addiction, with nine journalists, psychologists, psychiatrists and sociologists, was held at the Holistic Centre Bhasma, Larissa.

As a committee member of EYF, Swami Sivamurti travelled to the Netherlands to attend the EYF programs: Yogic Lifestyle and Yoga in our Addictive Society, which were organized by the Satyanandashram Nederasselt (the Netherlands) and the EYF. They were held at De Buitenjan, Veldhoven, in the presence of Swami Niranjanananda.

Rishi Vivekananda (Australia) lectured and gave seminars on various aspects of yoga and healthcare at the Paiania ashram, and at yoga centres in Athens, Corfu, Drama, Larissa, Kavala and Thessaloniki, as well as lectures and seminars in Bankya and Sofia, Bulgaria. Swami Satyaprakash (UK) was a guest speaker and gave programs and workshops at the In-service Training Program for teachers. Yogic Studies 1 (Greek and English) and Yogic Studies 2 (Greek) were also available at the ashram in 2002. Wandering seminars were held in the Peloponnese and the Ionian islands.

The first Greek edition of On the Wings of the Swan Volume 1 by Swami Niranjanananda was published, as well as the first Greek and the second English edition of The Indweller of the Heart by Swami Sivamurti.

In 2003, the Yogic Studies 1A course commenced at Satyanandashram Hellas with participants from various parts of Europe. Besides our regular ashram programs, we welcomed Swami Vedantananda (UK) back to the ashram to instruct teachers at the annual In-service Training. The Greek edition of Prana Pranayama Pranavidya was published.



Satsang at the ashram

The Olympic Games were held in Athens in 2004. Rishi Vivekananda (Australia) returned to Satyanandashram Hellas to give a seminar on Management of Depression, Anxiety and Stress. He gave another seminar on Christ's Teachings and Psychology in Relation to Family Life. Our annual Teacher Training Course was held again, as well as Sannyasa Life Experience 1 and 2, and a course on kriya yoga. New seminars included: Yoga and Beauty; Life, Death and Rebirth; Yoga and the Mind: Improving Memory; and Yoga Psychology: East Meets West. The first Pan-Centre Gathering was held, a special day for Greek yoga centres to introduce their students to the ashram and other Satyananda Yoga Students from all over Greece. Since 2004 this 'gathering' has become an annual favourite among teachers and students. The wandering seminar was held on the mainland in Pelion, and women's groups were formed in Athens, Kavala, Larissa and Thessaloniki. The fourth international conference, Yoga, Women and Spirituality, was held at the ashram and was attended by women from twelve eastern and western European countries.

Greek groups continued to travel regularly to India through the years for Guru Poornima and the end-of-year celebrations at Rikhia.



Swami Niranjan in Greece 2005

2005 Swami Niranjanananda visits Greece for the third time in 2005

We are meeting here in the spirit of yoga and in the spirit of love.

—Swami Niranjanananda

We were delighted to welcome Swami Niranjanananda back to Greece. He arrived in June and gave a seminar, Yoga, Balance and Harmony, following his visits to Colombia and Germany. Although, initially, it was to be an unofficial visit, the news gradually spread and over 650 participants attended from Australia, Austria, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Israel, Italy,

Morocco, the Netherlands, Serbia, Spain, Sweden, and the UK. Rishi Hridayananda (Australia), Swami Anandananda (Italy), Swami Satyaprakash (UK), Swami Savitananda (Netherlands), Swami Suryamitra (Netherlands), Swami Shrutigyana (Bulgaria), Swami Vivekamurti (Bulgaria), Sannyasi Achyutananda (UK) and Sannyasi Atmatattwa (UK) were also present.

Swami Niranjanananda opened his four-day program in the ashram with the words: “We are meeting here in the spirit of yoga and in the spirit of love. If you did not feel love, and if you were not connected to yoga, you would not be here. It is that pure feeling, which I see in each one of you, that makes me humble.” He gave us many inspiring talks on yoga, and the use of yoga for the systematic transformation of the basic qualities of life. The program included talks by various karma sannyasins from Greece with the themes: Plato and the Upanishads; Guru and Disciple Relationship in Ancient Greek and Vedic Traditions; and The Pythagorean Tradition and Yoga. Swami Niranjanananda told us: “There is an interesting comparison between the philosophy of Plato and that conveyed in the Upanishads. In Plato’s lifetime, the civilian mentality was not ready to accept the spiritual experiences, realities or concepts. Therefore, the thoughts of Plato are cryptic and contain a hidden meaning within them. However, the ideas conveyed in his teachings are the eternal truth.”

A number of workshops, given by ashram sannyasins, also took place during the four-day program. A group of Greek karma sannyasins performed a short play with a theme from ancient Greece. Traditional Greek dances were also performed in honour of Swami Niranjanananda. Over 300 aspirants were initiated by him: 83 into mantra; 53 into spiritual name; 141 into jignasu sannyasa; 60 into karma sannyasa; and 6 ashram residents into poorna sannyasa (Swami Hari Shakti, Swami Kevalyananda, Swami Om Murti, Swami Priyamurti, Swami Sattwamaya and Swami Savikalpa).

Once again, Swami Niranjanananda captured the hearts of those who had the good fortune to be in his presence. Before his visit a new kutir area was built, rooms and offices were renovated, and the garden was landscaped. The lectures and satsangs given by Swami Niranjanananda, during his 2005 visit, were compiled into a booklet and published by Satyanandashram Hellas with the title Yoga, Balance, Harmony.

Swami Sivamurti continued giving lectures and seminars within Greece and abroad, including Bulgaria (Borovitz, Sofia, Velingrad), Cyprus, Lebanon (Beirut), and Serbia (Belgrade). Rishi Vivekananda (Australia) was invited by Satyanandashram Hellas to give a public lecture at the Satyananda Yoga Centre Athens on Stress Management. He conducted seminars at the ashram on the same topic. Wandering seminars were held on the Sporades islands, and a Yoga, Sun, and Sea program was held on the island of Alonissos.

Swami Aparokshananda was appointed President of Satyanandasham Hellas and is the current office bearer.

2006–2007

If you want to experience any of the states of yoga, you have to live yoga. If you want to experience meditation, it is not good enough just to meditate for one or two or three hours every day. It is also important to live it, to understand what meditation is and what you are experiencing. It has to become a spontaneous part of your natural expression.

—Swami Niranjanananda

During 2006–2007 Swami Sivamurti travelled abroad giving lectures and seminars, including in Bulgaria (Sofia, Tsarsko Selo, Velingrad), Cyprus (Nicosia), Italy (Rimini), Turkey (Istanbul), Serbia (Belgrade, Novi Sad, Petrovaradin; and Krusedol and Grgeteg monasteries, Fruska Gora), Spain (Quantum Salud Conference, Madrid). She also accompanied Swami Niranjanananda to Italy and Slovenia. In addition to the annual ashram programs, courses on prana vidya, kriya yoga, and emotional management were conducted, Living Consciously (the seminars are similar to those developed at Rocklyn ashram, Australia) seminars and Satyananda Instructors Courses 1 and 2 were introduced.

Rishi Vivekananda (Australia) visited in 2006 to give seminars on the Bhagavad Gita and Yoga and Positivity. Swami Pragymurti (UK) gave two seminars, Creativity in Teaching and Tools of Transformation, at the 2007 In-service Teacher Training program. New programs included: Seven Ways to Develop Humour through Yoga, held in the Mani region, Peloponnese; and a five-day seminar introducing Living Consciously on the island of Serifos.

Our publishing house, Garuda Hellas, was established in 2007 and since then operates from Thessaloniki, with the aim to publish the books of the Satyananda Yoga tradition in Greek and make them available in all bookstores and other outlets nationwide.



2008

Swami Niranjanananda visits Greece for the fourth time in 2008

It is with this hope that I have come here, and this is the message that I have brought. Enough of dabbling with yoga in our life, what have we derived from it? Maybe some degree of health, of wellbeing, but now is the time to take a definite step. We have to experience the

simplicity of life and live according to the principles of human dharma. That is the final message of yoga. We can work together to build a better life and a better society by changing ourselves. The change has to come from within us, and we have to be ready for this change. This transformation of consciousness, energy and mind, is the spirit of yoga.

—Swami Niranjanananda

In 2008, Swami Niranjan's European tour started in Slovenia, continued through to Croatia and Hungary, and then, in May, he came to Greece. Prior to his visit, the ashram was a hive of activity with new buildings constructed in the ashram's orange grove, and overall renovations carried out to accommodate the five hundred people who attended his Living Yoga program. Disciples came from not only Greece and the Balkan countries, but also from Argentina, Colombia, Germany, India, Italy, Slovenia, Spain, and the UK. Swamis Anandananda and Suryamurti (Italy), Swamis Vishwashakti and Omkarmurti (Slovenia), Swami Pragymurti (UK), Swami Maitreyi (Sweden) and Swami Vedananda (Germany) were also present.

Greek karma sannyasins presented a play, based on Socrates' view of love in the words of his teacher Diotima, from Plato's The Symposium. The play was followed by Greek traditional songs and dances and a satsang with Swami Niranjanananda.

During the program, Swami Niranjanananda said: "When we are able to bring yoga into the expressible situations in life, then we begin to live yoga. Living yoga means that you incorporate the yogic principles to fine-tune your own nature, so that your emotional, intellectual and physical abilities and faculties are guided by inner strengths. These inner strengths are what



Swami Niranjan in Greece 2008

ultimately nourish and enhance life. Then life is seen as the reality, auspicious and beautiful. Everyone likes to admire the beauty. Let us take the sankalpa to make our life a beautiful one.” The first Women’s Symposium was celebrated at the ashram in May. Women’s groups came from the various Greek cities for the three-day program.

Men’s groups were also formed this year in Athens, Larissa-Volos, and Thessaloniki. They were directed by Swami Aparokshananda.

Swami Maitreyi (Sweden) visited for two months, during 2008 and 2009, and shared with us the experiences she had gained at BSY, Munger.

Swami Sivamurti lectured and held seminars throughout Greece and abroad including Bulgaria (Sandanski, Velingrad), Serbia (Belgrade, Fruska Gora), Spain (Mallorca), Russia (Moscow), and accompanied Swami Niranjan to South Africa. Other ashram swamis travelled throughout Greece, as well as Bulgaria, Romania and Serbia. New seminars were introduced: The SWAN principle, and Unmasking the Self, and summer programs were held at Pelion and on the island of Patmos.

The fifth Greek edition of Asana Pranayama Mudra Bandha was published in 2008.

2009

I am filled with heartfelt gratefulness to Swami Satyananda. It was he who gave me my life, and is my eternal inspiration. His presence overpoweringly fills my life and makes me what I am today.

—Swami Niranjanananda

Even the greatest of persons have to bow their heads in submission before death. Simply no one is spared. That is what I had seen and heard about death. Until I saw firsthand the event of Sri Swami Satyananda’s samadhi. He invited his own death. I might tell you, if you don’t already know this, that my guru had received the boon of iccha mrityu, or death by choice. He also had the knowledge of kaya kalpa, or total rejuvenation and metamorphosis of



Opening of Satyananda Yoga Centre Paiania, October 2009

the body. In other words, he did not have to die. He chose to die. He could have lived another twenty years in the same body if he wanted because he had the option. Of course, in true Swami Satyananda style he chose the more difficult option because, as we all have seen and known about him, he never did anything without a mandate or a divine purpose.

—Swami Satyasangananda

At midnight on 5 December 2009, our beloved guru Swami Satyananda, who lived as a paramahansa sannyasin, entered into mahasamadhi and assumed eternal consciousness.

In Greece, the ashram also followed the sixteen-day Shodashi Anushthana. Swami Sivamurti was joined at Rikhia by a group of Greek disciples and ashram residents for the Shodashi Pooja at Rikhiapeth, and the Shraddhanjali Saptah at Ganga Darshan.

On 31 October, the new Satyananda Yoga Centre Paiania was inaugurated by Swami Sivamurti, in the presence of the Ambassador of India to Greece, Mr Dilip Sinha; the Mayor of Paiania, Mr Dimitris Davaris; the Deputy Mayor, Mrs Angelopoulo; various Orthodox priests, and other local officials and residents. The building is a traditional building close to the centre of the town. Regular yoga classes are conducted by ashram sannnyasins.

During this year, all the traditional programs on the yogic calendar were conducted, as well as a Sannyasa Training course, In-service Teacher Training seminars, and Yogic Lifestyle programs for Bulgarian students. Swami Kevalyananda attended the ninth conference on Yoga,

Women and Spirituality at Goerlitz, Germany, where she held workshops on Yoga and Menopause.

Swami Sivamurti accompanied Swami Satyasangananda to England (Harrogate and London) and Ireland (Athenry). In July, she visited Rikhia and Munger for the Guru Poornima celebrations with a group of Greek disciples and again went at the end of the year.

The Greek edition of Yoga Nidra, published by Garuda Hellas, was launched in Thessaloniki, and another edition of Grace of Satyam: Sayings of Paramahansa Satyananda was published in Bulgarian, English and Greek.

JANUARY-25th ANNIVERSARY, 2010

The 25th anniversary of Satyanandashram Hellas at Paiania

What is the definition of sacrifice? You have only two loaves of bread and somebody comes to you for them. If you give, that is called sacrifice. If you have ten loaves of bread and somebody comes for two loaves from you, and you give, it is not sacrifice; it is called charity. I don't want charity from my disciples, I need sacrifice.

—Swami Satyananda

Following Paramahamsaji's mahasamadhi, the ashram has been observing the customary Greek remembrance rituals of forty days, six months, nine months, and one year. A memorial has also been built to honour him and

his continued grace and presence at Satyanandashram Hellas.

This year, Swami Sivamurti delivered a series of lectures in Bulgaria (Burgas, Plovdiv, Sofia, and Varna) and, in June, accompanied Swami Satyasangananda to France (Paris, Brittany) and Italy (Bologna, Montescudo). She also visited the Satyananda Yoga Foundation Hungary, where she spoke at Saint Marton Castle Almamellék, Vítál Kastélyszálló. She returned to Hungary for a series of seminars in July.

A three-week Satyananda Yoga Instructor's course was held. The annual Sannyasa Training course was dedicated to the mahasamadhi of Swami Satyananda and the sannyasa tradition he taught and lived. Other ashram programs included Antar Mouna, Mouna, Yoga and Self-Acceptance, Positive Thinking, Yoga and Hypertension, Importance of the Guru; as well as the festivals of Sivaratri, Navaratri and Guru Poornima. A kriya yoga course was held for Bulgarian students at the ashram. The women's and men's groups have continued to hold regular programs.

Swami Satyasangananda visited us in October and conducted the seminar, Know Yourself through Yoga, and presided over the Ashwin Navaratri programs at the ashram during this time. She gave imitations into mantra, jignasu sannyasa, karma sannyasa and poorna sannyasa (Swami Anandasagar, Swami Karmamukti, Swami Shradhamalananda, Swami Sivakripa). She was a special guest for the celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of Satyanandashram Hellas at Paiania.

This year, Garuda Hellas published Greek editions of Surya Namaskara by Swami Satyananda, Tattwa Shuddhi by Swami Satyasangananda, Nawa Yogini Tantra by Swami Muktananda, Satsangs on Yoga by Swami Satyasangananda and Sri Vijnana Bhairava Tantra by Swami Satyasangananda.



Customary Greek remembrance ritual for Swami Satyananda, 3 months after his Mahasamadhi, 2010

Moving Forwards

Even though Paramahamsaji has cast off his body, he is still alive and amongst us, inspiring and uplifting us to experience spiritual bliss and ecstasy, thus transforming even his departure from this earthly plane into a spiritual experience.

—Swami Satyasangananda

In this year of our twenty-fifth anniversary, we look over all that has taken place both here, and in the other places we occupied before we moved to Paiania. Much



has happened, at an accelerated pace, since the first yoga seeds were sown by Swami Sivamurti in Kalamata.

Yoga is now accepted without fear in Greece and throughout the western world. We no longer just focus on yoga as it relates to health, but on the many other aspects of yoga and related disciplines. We are no longer restricted to the classroom, but have moved out into the wider community, to help people apply the principles and techniques of yoga to give their lives more significance and meaning.

As each day of the new millennium passes, we see more and more doors open to fulfil, in fresh and challenging ways, our guru's mission "to carry the message of yoga from shore to shore and from door to door".

Hari Om Tat Sat



Satyananda Yoga Centre Thessaloniki

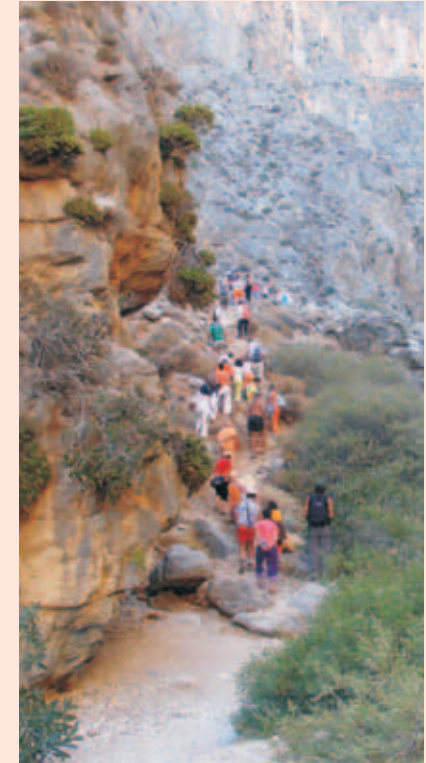
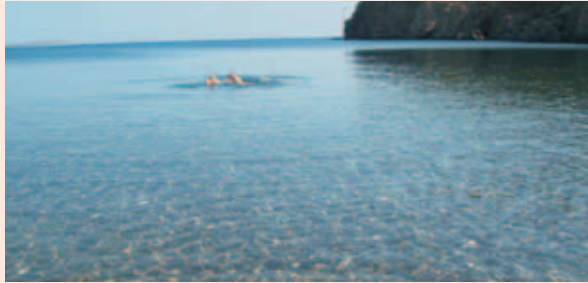


Satyananda Yoga Centre Paiania



Satyananda Yoga Centre Athens

Wandering seminars in Greece and abroad 2000s



Satyanandashram Hellas, Paiania 2009



25th Anniversary of Satyanandashram Hellas

17 October 2010, Paiania

Swami Sivamurti

Thank you very much for being here, on this day when we are celebrating the 25th year of inauguration of this ashram by Paramahansa Satyananda, in 1985. He inaugurated this ashram and called it the 'True Bliss Ashram'. He said it was open to everyone, to all classes, to all creeds, to all countries, and it was to be a place where one could discover oneself through yoga.

When he came in 1985, together with Swami Satyasangananda, that was his eighth visit to Greece. He started coming to Greece in 1978. When I was in India, living in his ashram, I had asked him if he would come to Greece. And he said, "I will never come to Greece." That was the first

shock treatment I had from my guru. But I had also heard that sometimes what he says and what he does can be two different things. So, after coming back to Greece in 1976, I learnt that he was to visit Spain and I went to see him there. I said, "Paramahamsaji, will you come to Greece?" It took a lot of courage to do that because he had already said no. But I was really desperate because I wanted him so much to come to Greece. So I asked him, and he replied, "But of course I will come to Greece." As though I had never asked the question before, as if it was absolutely natural that he would come to Greece. So he came to Greece and he came eight times over. On the eighth visit, he inaugurated this ashram where you are all sitting today.

He was my inspiration, he was my love, he was everything in my life, and whatever you see here today is the result of his grace. Since that time, his spiritual successor, Swami Niranjanananda has visited Greece four times. Many of you who are here today are his disciples, so I want to mention now that the credit also goes to him, because it is also as a result of his visits to Greece that the ashram has flourished. He has sent his good wishes to all of us today together with the wish that we continue for many years to come in our effort to serve. I also want to mention Swami Satyasangananda who is sitting here with me. This is her fourth visit to Greece. She was here at the inauguration of this ashram twenty-five years ago along with Swami Satyananda. I find it very important and special that she was here then and that she is here today, when we are celebrating our silver anniversary.

I'd like to not only thank Swami Satyananda for inspiring me and giving me the opportunity to be here in Greece with all of you and Swami Niranjanananda for coming and visiting and inspiring us all and Swami Satyasangananda for being here then and now, but I also want to thank all of you. I want to thank all of you from the bottom of





my heart for being here. There are too many people to thank them all personally. But there are all the disciples, there are all the students, there are all the teachers of Satyananda Yoga whom I would like to thank.

I would also like to thank all the builders, the people who have helped to build this ashram. I'd like to thank my mother, Swami Jagadamba, whom Paramahamsaji initiated into sannyasa, because without her effort and love and support we would never have been able to purchase this land. I'd like to thank all the Greek people who have been here and supported us through the years. From the bottom of my heart, thank you. The ashram as beautiful as it looks today could never be achieved by one person. It was a team effort, we were all involved. So, I'd like to thank the people who built it, the Bulgarians especially. Without the Bulgarian support, these buildings wouldn't be here, together with the Albanians. And all of the finishing touches of the iron work have been done by local masters in this area.

There are so many people to thank, I would like to thank Swami Niranjanananda especially, because he asked me last year to prepare two albums, one on Satyananda Yoga in Greece, in relation to Swami Satyananda, and the second on Satyananda Yoga in Greece in relation to Swami Niranjanananda. Through the compilation of these books, so many memories over the last twenty-five years have come to surface. In there I have written my heartfelt thanks to all who helped in the creation of this ashram. Swami Satyananda said in his inauguration speech, "An ashram is built through selfless service. It is built through the love and goodwill of everyone who comes here." It is not the creation of one person. In the early years he said, "You can't do everything alone, you have to build a team of people around you, you have to develop a group of people around you who will support the effort of bringing yoga to Greece." And you are the part of that team. So, thank you to all the Greek people, thank you to all the Bulgarians, thank you to all the Serbians, thank you to all the Romanians, and to the Albanians for making it possible for us to be here today, to celebrate the twenty-five years since the inauguration of this ashram with Paramahamsaji.

I'd like to invite Swami Satyasangananda who is our guest here, and has been for the last week, to address this ensemble and comment on the 'then' of how everything was, when she arrived twenty-five years ago, and the 'now', of this particular year.

Swami Satyasangananda

Thank you so much for your love.

Disciples of Swami Satyananda, disciples of Swami Niranjanananda, devotees, well-wishers and distinguished guests of Paiania Ashram. I cannot express how happy I am to be here today. Not just happy, but honoured.

I have heard that history repeats itself and today I am seeing it happen. Twenty-five years ago, at this time, when I came with Swami Satyananda, I could not have dreamt or imagined that twenty-five years later I would be here, to rekindle the flame which he lit on that day. I still remember that day very clearly. At that time, there was nothing here. We were just sitting on the lawn and there were a few sheds here and there, there was a kitchen and some rooms, and just lawns. Where we were sitting, in the middle of the lawn, Swami Sivamurti was on one side of him, and I was on the other side, and there were a lot of devotees. It was a beautiful occasion and it had a beautiful ambience about it. Even then, there were people from all nationalities, all religions, all races, and all creeds present. Even on that day, one could foresee that this place held a lot of promise. Swami Satyananda called it the 'True Bliss Ashram'. Twenty-five years later, I can say that his words have definitely come true. When I entered here, I was absolutely amazed. The ashram was glowing



with divine light, and there was a feeling of happiness, joy and bliss. It was truly the place Swami Satyananda called the 'True Bliss Ashram'.

One can easily see that the purpose, the spirit with which this place was born, has been kept alive in these twenty-five years. It is very easy to start something, but it is difficult to keep the spirit alive. The seed which Swami Satyananda planted that day, twenty-five years ago, you can see it blossoming today. There is a time for everything. Before the time is right, nothing blossoms. In these twenty-five years, the selfless spirit with which the work was done here under the guidance of Swami



Sivamurti, her selflessness, her sincerity, her dedication and her innocence, you can see the results of that today.

An ashram is a place where people come to work hard. It is not a monastery where monks live. The word ashram is derived from the root shram meaning 'to labour'. What does it mean to labour? It does not mean that you have to carry bricks and break stones. It is not only physical labour. There is mental labour, there is spiritual labour, and there is emotional labour. It is a place where you come to work on yourself. For that place to flourish, to work successfully, it is important that the people who live there, who look after the place, the caretakers of that place, be simple, and lead a simple life. It is important that they are innocent, not crooked, and they have only one motive: to help others. That, I think, this ashram is fulfilling very well. Swami Satyananda may have said to Swami Sivamurti that he will never come to Greece, but what he must have meant was, "I will come when the time is right", because he always felt a very deep connection with Greece and the Greeks. Greece has a very strong connection with India. You all know the history, I don't think I have to tell you how the connection, the interaction between Greece and India took place a long, long time ago, politically, culturally, socially, and even philosophically. One of the greatest emperors the world has produced, was Ashoka the Great, from India, and he was half Greek. The region from which Swami Satyananda came, and where I come from, the people look like Greeks. They have the same eyes, the same nose, they have those features, even now. Many of the girls and boys from Greece must have been married into those families. You can see those genes even now. So, you can even say that there are blood relations between India and Greece. That is why he had a great love for Greece and the Greeks had a great love for him.



Another important reason why he loved Greece was because of its contribution to philosophy. Being a philosopher himself, he could appreciate the philosophical contribution of Greece to the world, which, apart from India, no other country has been able to do. Therefore, he gave a lot of time to Greece. He travelled the length and breadth of Greece, to all the islands, to all the places, and I was privileged to travel with him.

This ashram is very fortunate because it had a great beginning and that was the blessing of Swami Satyananda, and also the blessings of Swami Niranjanananda. This morning, when I spoke to him and told him that today we are going to celebrate twenty-five years of the Greek ashram, he was very, very happy to hear that, and he sent his best wishes and blessings for the further success of this ashram, to which his contribution is also very great. The guru may give his blessings, the guru may have a vision and a plan, the guru may offer all the good wishes for a place, but it can succeed only if he gets the right disciple. Even the guru needs a medium through which he can fulfil the task which he has in mind. Swami Satyananda's task was only one, to help the suffering mankind. That is the

tradition of sannyasa in which he was initiated by his guru. We don't belong to any sect or religion. I may have my own religion, but I don't work for the propagation of any sect or religion. Swami Satyananda never worked for that. He had only one thing in mind. It doesn't matter where you come from, who you are, what is your religion, what is your nationality, but if you need help, he would try to help you. That is the definition of sannyasa which he gave us. Sannyasa does not mean a monk. It is made up of two words: sam and nyasa. Sam means total and nyasa means consecration. Total consecration. That is sannyasa.

Supposing you have ten thousand dollars and you say that you give it for the help of blind people. After that, those ten thousand dollars don't belong to you. Supposing one day you need one thousand dollars, you cannot take it out from there, because you have consecrated it totally for the blind. In the same way, a sannyasin consecrates himself to the selfless service of others. After taking sannyasa, he does not think about himself, he thinks only about others. If he does, then he is not a sannyasin. As a sannyasin you have to give everything: your mind, your talent, your energy, whatever God has given you, you have to use it for others. That is the definition of sannyasa that Swami Satyananda gave us. He said that a sannyasin does not work for his own salvation, for his own liberation; he works for others. That is his worship. In the ashram, the sannyasins don't sit and meditate the whole day long, if you think that is what they do. They are busy from early morning, cleaning and cooking. When the people come, they teach them yoga and help them in whatever they require. From early morning, the ashram becomes a big hub of activity, until late evening it continues like that. It is like a beehive of activity. To do all that, to make it possible, the guru needs a medium, needs a disciple of that calibre, who can maintain that spirit in the ashram,

who can maintain that level of innocence, sincerity, purity. In that, without a doubt we can see that Swami Sivamurti has been very, very true to the spirit of an ashram. It is not easy; she has worked very hard. However, because of her discipleship, she was successful even in the difficulties, in the hard work which she had to do, because she received the grace of her guru. I don't have to prove my words, you can see all around you. This land was barren twenty-five years ago. It was just like a barren hill. Today it has been converted into a paradise. Many of you who have been with her for all those years and supported her and worked with her, are testimony to that. So, it is with great joy that I am here today, and speaking these words to you. They say that history repeats itself. Today, when we were doing the havan, the fire ceremony for Swami Satyananda, I had the vision of him coming here, once again, as a young man, and you will again have his darshan. History will repeat itself. Just keep the flame burning. That's all.

Father Vissarion

Dear brothers and sisters,

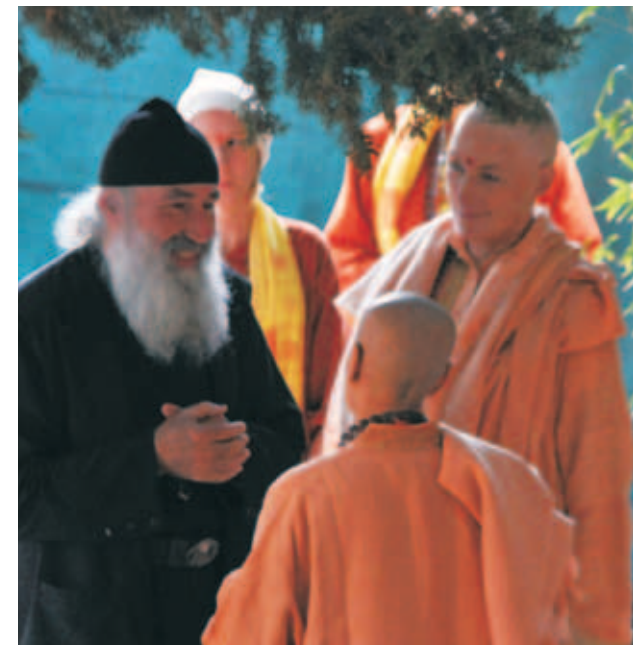
Being here again with you today brings me great joy and happiness. This occasion brings memories from ten years ago, in 2000, when I first visited the ashram of Swami Satyananda in India. He was an outstanding teacher, and just as the pupils of Christ did not recognize Christ's true value while he was alive, in the same way, I could say, many of us were not able to recognize the true value of Gururji. It was only after he left us that we realized what he had done for India, for Greece and for the whole world. His amazing energy of giving and offering constantly, brought us to India in 2000, in order to conduct a mass in the name of the Holy Mother. Many miracles happened during our trip and stay there, and the moments that we experience today, take us back to those days. I always carry Swami

Satyananda in my heart and remember his name when I conduct mass. His love and my love are forever united. I thank him for everything he has done, and for all the things he continues to do from where he is now, and for giving us his blessings. I express my respect and gratitude to him.

In the same way that we need a teacher when we start going to school, or a doctor when we are not feeling well, we need a spiritual teacher too, or a guru. This is absolutely essential in the life of every person so one can continue their personal evolution.

So, I am here with you today and feel really privileged, because we have been given this chance once again to unite ourselves in the spirit of love, in the spirit of God, and remember once again Gururji.

Thank you very much.



GURU IS THE DISPELLER OF DARKNESS OR IGNORANCE. HE IS THE GUIDING HAND, THE AWAKENING VOICE AND THE ILLUMINATING TOUCH. THE LINK BETWEEN THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE IMMORTAL, THE ONE WHOM GRACE GUIDES A DISCIPLE ON THE SPIRITUAL PATH.

ΓΕΝΟΥΣ ΕΙΝΑΙ ΕΚΙΝΟΣ ΤΟΥ ΔΙΑΝΕΙ ΤΟ ΕΚΤΑΣΙ
ΤΗΝ ΑΝΘΡΩ. ΤΟ ΚΑΡ ΤΟΥ ΚΑΘΟΔΗΤΕΙ Η ΦΩΝΗ
ΤΟΥ ΑΦΥΤΙΝΕΙΣ ΤΟ ΑΙΤΙΜΑ ΤΟΥ ΦΩΤΙΖΕΙ
ΕΙΝΑΙ Ο ΚΗΚΟΣ ΤΟΥ ΣΥΝΑΕΙ ΤΟ ΟΥΝΗΤΟ ΜΕ
ΤΟ ΑΒΑΝΑΤΟ ΕΚΙΝΟΣ ΤΟΥ ΜΕ ΤΗ ΚΑΡΗ ΤΟΥ
ΚΑΘΟΔΗΤΕΙ ΤΟΝ ΜΑΘΗΤΗ ΣΤΟ ΠΝΕΥΜΑΤΙΚΟ
ΜΟΝΟΠΑΤΙ

ALL THE DISCIPLES OF THE GURU ARE CALLED TO FOLLOW HIM. HE IS THE GUIDING HAND, THE AWAKENING VOICE AND THE ILLUMINATING TOUCH. THE LINK BETWEEN THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE IMMORTAL, THE ONE WHOM GRACE GUIDES A DISCIPLE ON THE SPIRITUAL PATH.

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